

MATVEI TEVELYOV

*"VERKHOVINA,
OUR LAND SO DEAR"*

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

LIBRARY OF SELECTED SOVIET LITERATURE

Matvei Tevelyou

**"VERKHOVINA,
OUR LAND SO DEAR"**



М. М. Евсеев

МАТВЕЙ ТЕВЕЛЕВ

*„СВЕТ ТЫ НАШ,
ВЕРХОВИНА...”*



ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

MATVEI TEVELYOV

*"VERKHOVINA,
OUR LAND SO DEAR"*



FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

EDITED BY S. ROSENBERG

**ILLUSTRATED AND DESIGNED
BY A. F. TARAN**

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

At the age of seventeen, with no thought of a literary career, I set out rambling through my native country, eager to observe life in its remotest corners and to learn as much as possible of its many towns and villages. Twice I scaled the mountains of Georgia, Armenia and Daghestan, and traversed the arid steppes round the Arax, working in orchards and vineyards when harvest time came along. I saw how the efforts of the people were converting desert land into green cotton-fields and making life-giving water ripple down newly-erected canals. I saw the change that was coming over the people themselves in the rugged mountains I visited, so that amity and goodwill were taking the place of the old strength-sapping blood feuds.

When I was returning to our new home in Leningrad, where my family had moved from a village in the woods round Smolensk, I had among the scanty belongings in my knapsack two note-books containing my first stories.

However, some years passed before I took up writing as a profession. In the meantime I worked at the Chamber of Weights and Measures, at a photograph-paper mill and later as a librarian, attended a young workers' evening school and continued writing.

My first works to be published were a small collection of short stories entitled *The Boot-Cleaner's* and a narrative called *Mountains Change Face*. These appeared in Leningrad, in 1932 and 1933.

In the grim winter of 1942, when the beleaguered Leningrad, where I lived and worked, was gallantly holding back the onslaught of the Hitler hordes, I turned journalist.

At the close of the Great Patriotic War I went to the Sub-Carpathian region as a correspondent for the Soviet Information Bureau.

A chain of green mountains and a narrow strip of flat country, stretching along the Soviet Union's south-western border with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania, make up the terri-

tory of Sub-Carpathia, the youngest of the many regions reunited to Soviet Ukraine

During my years as correspondent there, I footed it along many of the roads in the Carpathian Mountains, lived for long periods at a time in the out-of-the-way villages of Verkhovina (the name borne by the highland part of this region), covering the news, writing features and stories about the new life that was taking root, about the newly-organized collective farms, the first-born schools in the native language, and the tireless efforts of Communist Party members. My daily work as correspondent, naturally, helped me to a greater and deeper understanding of the history of the Sub-Carpathian Ukrainians and their land. The grim past of this small nationality, the staunch courage which made it, through centuries of oppression and suffering, preserve its language, customs, national dignity, and a profound attachment for its greater Motherland the Ukraine, stirred me deeply.

However, the idea of writing a novel about Sub-Carpathia did not occur to me at once. A deep admiration for a people's fortitude and a knowledge of their history was not enough to conceive a novel of any value. What I needed, I felt, was to be inspired by the story of a human life whose pulse-beats I could feel with my own heart.

One rainy day in the mountains, in 1948, I came across a thirteen-year-old shepherd-lad, Ivanko Kruchanyuk by name. While the cows and sheep grazed on the hill-sides, the boy sat in a tent reading Boris Polevoi's *A Story about a Real Man*, now and then letting his gaze wander to the herd. I took shelter from the rain in the same tent and found the boy a bright, well-read youngster, who was chairman of his school's Young Naturalist and Michurinist Group.

I had never heard an expert speak so fascinatingly and exhaustively of the alpine pastures, of the peculiar features of the grasses grown there, and of the mountain soil, as did this thirteen-year-old budding naturalist. He told me of the experiments carried out on the school plot by the members of his group, who were raising crops never before grown in Verkhovina.

"What are you going to be when you grow up?" I asked the lad.

"An agronomist," he replied with the confidence of one who knows that every opportunity is open to him.

"There were lads here just like Ivanko in former times," I thought, "dreaming of growing up to be agronomists. What became of them?"

With my mind working in this direction, I came gradually to sketch in my book of notes the life story of Ivan Belinets, the fictitious hero of the novel I hoped to write. I saw him as an intellectual risen from the ranks of the people, a gifted young man, whose desire to better the life of the people clashed with the order of society in bourgeois Czechoslovakia.

To call Ivan Belinets a "fictitious hero," however, is not quite correct; for soon after I had met the shepherd-boy, I discovered that there was an agronomist working on an upland collective farm, at the village of Repinnoye, who had had a life which fitted in very well with that of the character of my creation. Indeed, when I went to see him and listened to what he told me of his history, it seemed to me for a moment that he had read it all in my own book of notes.

In my later work on the novel, I must say, I seldom resorted to invention. This, perhaps, is not one of the merits of a work of fiction, but the factual material at my disposal served my purpose only too well.

As to the other characters of my novel—the people in the Carpathians hold dear the memory of Olexa Borkanyuk (Olexa Kurinets in the novel), a Communist and bold fighter for the people's cause, executed by Horthy's hirelings in Margit, the Budapest prison; Olexa Ulinets and Vasil Voshchepenets, prototypes of Gorulya, are today working indefatigably to transform life in their mountainous country; but to this day people in Verkhovina wince at the mere mention of the names of the dirty politician Shcheretsky (Leshchetsky in the novel) or Matlakh, an utterly ruthless individual where his self-interest was concerned. I had no need to invent these characters; they came from life to fill their respective places in my novel. It is another question, of course, how convincing I have succeeded in making them—but that is up to the reader to judge.

It took me five years to write this novel. Now that it is published, I am eager to write another—about present-day Verkhovina and the remarkable changes I have witnessed there.

MATVEI TEVELYOV

***"VERKHOVINA,
OUR LAND SO DEAR"***



1

A SMALL house with a garden stands in one of the streets of Uzhgorod, nestling against the slope of a hill. Out of its windows, you get a view of the whole town, with its ancient castle, its vineyards, its tiled roofs and the river running shallow in summer.

A paved path with many cracks in it leads from the gate through the garden and up to the glass-panelled door. It was through that door that Ruzhana and I first entered this house when we were both young, and along that path our little boy Ilko learned to walk. In this house. . . .

But the house comes later in my tale.

I was born and grew up in the village of Studenitsa, in Verkhovina,¹ where steep-roofed log-cottages cling to a

¹ Verkhovina—the mountainous part of Carpathian Ukraine.—*Ed.*

narrow gorge between two heights, and thick spruce groves climb up the hill-sides like giant flights of steps.

To glimpse the sky from inside any of the cottages you had to sit on the earthen floor and peer through the very top of the window. Only then could the eye reach the mountain crests and the narrow blue strip between them; if you gazed long enough, that strip looked like a river flowing between green banks.

Tourists came from Vienna, Budapest and Prague to admire the beauty of the green Carpathians. Enterprising innkeepers built log-cabins by the streams; hunters offered their services to those wishing to track down the deer and wild boar; and visitors were taught the art of trout-fishing in the swift, ice-cold streams.

True, every bird praises its own nest, yet surely nowhere but in our Carpathians are there such vast mountain forests, such mineral springs bubbling from the ground, or such mysteriously beautiful summer days when the mountains, the distant alpine meadows and the tiny patches of plough-land, distinctly outlined, shimmer blue in the heat haze.

If you look at our forested Carpathians from the distance, they seem smiling, peaceful and easily accessible. You won't see a single bare cliff, a single stony scree; you might think that the rolling green waves had been halted in their course by a magic spell. Plunge into them, however, and you will find yourself in a world of dim ravines and roaring mountain torrents, and your heart will stand still at the sight of the ancient beeches and spruces, so huge that you wonder how they can keep their hold on the steep slopes.

And how lovely our Verkhovina is in winter, with its frequent falls of snow! In these parts the snow is not dry and powdery but comes down in an impenetrable, moving white wall of big fluffy flakes. The trees can barely hold the weight of their tall white caps of layer upon

layer of snow. A deep silence reigns. Then the sky clears, the sun peeps through, and its rays, striking merry sparks, bring out rainbow tints of blue, violet, pale green and deep purple. And the mountains!—they seem to soar over the earth like many-tiered clouds sailing in the blue sky.

But it was not the forest-clad mountains, not the rivers with their heavy, dark-green waters like liquid glass, not the clear blue air that made up the life of Verkhovina, it was grinding poverty and the endless struggle for existence.

Ten centuries ago, these border-lands of Kiev Rus were overrun by Magyar tribes. The Carpathian ploughmen and herdsmen rose in defence of their verdant mountain country, but the enemy far outnumbered them. The invading Magyar horsemen, trampling the ploughlands and setting ablaze the villages of the recalcitrant, established themselves in the new lands. They vanquished the country by fire and sword, but could not subdue the people, who retired far into the mountains, bent upon preserving their native tongue, religion and customs, and remaining loyal to the great homeland, from which their country was forcibly severed.

Century followed century, generation followed generation, states rose and fell; whole nations disappeared, leaving no trace except in chronicles and legends. But nothing could drain dry the tributary that had been cut off from big Rus—neither brutal oppression, nor the intrigues of the hated Uniate Church,¹ which was imposed upon the people; neither the persistent Magyarization carried out by the Austro-Hungarian rulers, nor cruel poverty.

¹ The Uniate Church emerged as a result of the union of the Greek Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church under the authority of the Pope. In the Carpathians this took place in 1649. This attempt by the Vatican to dominate the Greek Orthodox Church was strenuously opposed by the mass of believers.—*Ed.*

The peasants' plough-land lay in tiny patches on the steep hill-sides, squeezed in between the Count's forests and meadows. A bitter joke was current about the size of these patches—one would say: "If you want to take a nap on your field at midday, Mikola, lie down in the middle but be sure you pull up your legs, or you'll be trespassing on the Count's land."

The rain and the spring waters washed all the goodness from the soil. The spring frosts withered the young crops, and only sickly oats and barley struggled for life on the peasants' land. Higher up, on the mountain pastures lying amid the beeches and spruces, poisonous alpine sorrel and clumps of stunted juniper crowded out the fodder grass, and the herds were cramped in the islands where it still grew.

As far back as I can remember, there was never a year when Famine did not visit Verkhovina; it usually came after Christmas and for a month or so seemed to be testing its strength.

The district authorities regarded hunger in Verkhovina as natural and inevitable as the passing of the seasons; they feared one thing only—hunger-riots. Charity balls were held in the "Corona" Hotel in Uzhgorod, and gendarmes appeared in the villages of Verkhovina.

But Famine grew insolent, it strode from cottage to cottage, inflating the children's stomachs and felling grown-up men and women; lonely bells tolled incessantly in the wooden churches built without nails.

... I cannot remember my father. I was not yet four when he set out to seek a living in America. But I can still see the village street before the inn that cold spring day when he left. Clinging to my mother's skirt, I stood before the inn window. Mother's face was wet with tears, like those of the other women standing there with her. A dozen knapsacks and freshly-made walnut staves lay piled up on the porch, ready for the long journey.

Loud drunken shouts came from the inn, where the men were having a farewell drink. At first separate voices could be made out, then all blended into one general hubbub soon stilled by a heart-rending melody:

*On the lofty mountain pastures
The winds howl. . .*

The women wept—quietly, submissively, and pressed their children to their skirts. My mother wept too, her hands around my head. Then the men, heartened by brandy, came out one after another, still singing. They picked up their knapsacks and staves, lurched down from the porch and began to take leave of their families.

This scene, perhaps, is particularly fresh and vivid in my memory because of the many times I witnessed such leave-takings. Not a year passed without scores or hundreds of men quitting Verkhovina in search of an illusory happiness. They went to France, to Belgium, to Canada, to the United States.

Thus my father departed, too, and never returned. Whether he was alive or dead nobody could say, and no answer came to the letters written for my mother by the only literate man in the village, Ilko Gorulya.

Life was hard for my mother, but she did not marry again, although many sent match-makers to her. My mother was truly beautiful. I can see her before me now, her oval face with its olive skin, her black hair and light-grey eyes with eye-lashes so thick that they cast a shadow like spruce on a sunny day.

She seldom smiled, was sparing of caresses and preferred to listen rather than talk.

When all hope of my father's return faded, Mother began to think of how to escape from the dire poverty in which we lived. She could see only one way: to give me an education, so that I could abandon the land which

had failed to provide a decent living either for my grandfather or my father. She began to talk more and more often about my schooling, it became the one aim of her life, and the old folk know how difficult it was to attain.

2

The only school in which children of our district could study in their own language was six miles from Studenitsa, beyond the mountains, in the village of Bystroye. The road there lay across a steep defile, and was impassable in winter.

Nobody could make out why the authorities had opened a school in that small, distant hamlet, instead of Studenitsa or Potoki, which children from the near-by villages could easily reach. One day, however, an official from Uzhgorod passing through Studenitsa, his tongue loosened by an extra drink or two in the inn, let the secret out: "That's just why it's there, so that fewer could attend. It's quite enough for the Verkhovina rabble."

My mother was so intent upon my going to school that she was ready to sell the cottage and move to Bystroye.

"What does it matter?" she said to the neighbours. "I've no land, there's nothing to keep us here." Nevertheless, her heart was heavy at the thought of leaving her native village.

One spring day in 1914, when the wind had dried the mountain paths and the forest was putting on its lacy gown of fresh green, my mother said to me: "Tomorrow we'll go to Bystroye, son. We must talk to the school-master and look for some kind of home."

About noon the next day we stood before the door of a long narrow shack with small windows and a crumbling roof overgrown with green moss. The front wall

bulged and was shored up with three beams. In some of the windows the glass was missing and had been replaced by oiled paper.

This was the school at Bystroye.

Some time ago the teacher at this school was a deacon of the Uniate Church, a tall, bald-headed, heartless man, who beat the children and made them kneel for hours before the fly-specked portrait of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary. He drank like a fish, until at last he drank himself into his coffin, freezing to death one night before the door of his own cottage.

For a year the school was closed; there was none who wished to come and teach in this god-forsaken place. Everybody thought it would stay closed the following year too, but at the end of autumn a teacher suddenly appeared.

People said that Mikhailo Kurtinets, son-in-law of the village blacksmith Vasil Migovka, had been living in Bystroye with his wife and year-old son since the previous spring. Before that he had been a mechanic at a chemical mill somewhere near the Tisza, but had left his job and come to his father-in-law because his wife was in poor health and had to have mountain air. That was what people said. Later, however, it leaked out that there had been another reason why Mikhailo Kurtinets had come to Bystroye.

The chemical mill manager had found this self-taught mechanic far too educated and well-read for his taste. Nor did he like Kurtinets' quiet dignity. And when he was told of things the mechanic had been saying to the other workers—saying that the people could manage quite well without emperor or bosses—the manager began to lose patience. Then one day he himself heard Kurtinets saying that it was not true that the Russines'

¹ Carpathian Ukrainians, before they rejoined Soviet Ukraine, were called Russines.—*Tr.*

had settled on Magyar land; on the contrary, nomad Magyar tribes had seized these outlying districts of Russia and been lording it over them for ten centuries. . . . Although the mechanic was an excellent man at his job and able to turn his hand to anything, he was discharged and an Austrian was taken on in his place.

Kurtinets tried to get work at some sawmills, but found that he was on their black list. There was nothing left but to go to his father-in-law, already getting on in years, and help him at the smithy.

Kurtinets settled down in Bystroye and made friends with the people there. One day he happened to hear the villagers talking in the smithy about the closed school, and immediately sent in an application for permission to teach there. The official to whom he applied was so glad of a chance to get off his mind this school in Verkhovina, which he had never even seen, that he went so far as to recommend Kurtinets. That was how Bystroye got its schoolmaster.

In the mountain villages they spoke highly of the new teacher. He not only taught well, they said, but he was not afraid, if need be, to take the part of the villagers against the "executors" (officials carrying out government decisions) or even the Count's steward.

Folk thought the world of Kurtinets; the Studenitsa shepherd Ilko Gorulya who had written my mother's letters to my father, a man with a harsh, mocking tongue, spent much time with the village schoolmaster and brightened visibly whenever he was mentioned.

The Bystroye school should by right have had a Uniate priest as supervisor, but as the village had none, and the parish priest came rarely and reluctantly, the school was supervised by the village elder.

One day the elder appeared there during break. The teacher was in his own quarters and the children stared

curiously at the corpulent man carrying a crude, heavy staff.

The elder cast a suspicious look round the unlovely class-room and suddenly grunted; the regulation portrait of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor was not hanging over the teacher's desk, but beside the stove, and at the teacher's end hung portraits, in carved ash frames, of two men completely unknown to the elder. The head of one was crowned by a mass of curly hair, his arms were folded and his gaze was fixed somewhere in the distance; the second had long, drooping moustaches, a tall sheepskin hat and eyes that seemed to follow every movement the elder made.

"Who are those?" growled the elder.

"Writers," came the reply in a faltering chorus.

"What writers?"

"Our writers," came the chorus again, somewhat more boldly. "That one there—he's Pushkin, and that's Shevchenko."

"H'm," said the elder, cudgelling his brains. "I don't seem to remem. . . ."

"But they're ours, they're Russian!" cried one of the little urchins in amazement.

"Russian?" the elder repeated, and red blotches mottled his face. "Who put them up there?"

"I did," came the answer. The visitor turned and saw the schoolmaster entering.

"This is an imperial school," said the elder, "and you hang up pictures of scribblers here. . . ."

"What's wrong with that?" Kurtinets asked, smiling.

"I'll tell you what's wrong," said the elder, fixing the teacher with his eye. "I've heard that you teach the children the wrong kind of things."

The smile disappeared from the teacher's face.

"What do I teach them? Let's have it in plain words."

The elder drew a deep breath and mumbled, with a sidelong glance at the children:

"Well, that... that Russians and Ukrainians and Moscovites are brothers..."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" said the teacher. "You know yourself it is."

"What I know is my own business," replied the elder. "Your business is to take away those writers.... I'm telling you for your own good...."

"Thank you for your kindness," Kurtinets said with a laugh. "But the pictures will stay where they are."

"I hope you won't live to regret it!"

"What's that? A threat?"

"No, just a warning," said the elder. In his heart he rejoiced over Kurtinets' obstinacy, for it provided an opportunity to get rid of the refractory teacher.

The very same day even in Studenitsa it became known that the Bystroye elder was going to town to inform the authorities.

He left at dawn, but before he had gone five miles a group of men stepped out from behind the trees along the road and barred his way. Their hats were pulled low over their foreheads, and in the dim light he could not see their faces, but the axes thrust into their broad leather belts told him that they were wood-cutters.

Sensing danger, the elder whipped up his horse; it jerked the light trap forward, but a tall man in a short patched jacket, whom he took particular note of (people said later that it was Gorulya of Studenitsa), deftly caught the bridle and gave it such a tug that the horse snorted with pain and reared.

"What's this?" cried the elder, plucking up courage. "What d'you want?"

"Where are you going?" asked the man who had stopped the horse.

"To buy a cow."

"That's a lie!" the man retorted, stepping up closer. "You're going to your bosses to inform on the schoolmaster and get patted on the back for it."

The elder paled.

"So it's he that's set you on to me!"

"He's said nothing to us, we found out ourselves, and if you know what's good for you, you'll let the schoolmaster alone; if you or anyone else touch him, we'll burn you down together with your farm. Understand? Keep a hundred gendarmes in the village and they won't save you!"

"What does this mean? Get you gone!" shouted the elder.

"Don't you start getting cocky," the man in the short jacket warned him with a harsh laugh, "or the priest may be reading your funeral service."

"Why waste talk on him?" a stocky wood-cutter in a homespun coat broke in impatiently. "Turn that horse round and get home quick," he snapped at the elder, "and remember—you answer for the schoolmaster! That's all. And if you try to find out who we are, the worse for you!"

He took the bridle, turned the trap on the narrow path and gave such a merry whoop that the horse started off at a gallop, heedless of the reins.

For a long time after that the elder went about the village with a face black as thunder. He was harder on the villagers than ever, but he left the teacher alone.

...I had never seen the Bystroye schoolmaster, and pictured him as tall, grey-haired and stern, but the man who met Mother and me on the school porch was thick-set and sturdy, with a broad face, high cheek-bones and quick black eyes that held a steady look of confidence. He came down the steps and shook hands with us.

"You want me to teach this young man?"

"Have the great goodness, sir."

Kurtinets laid a hand on my shoulder.

"What village are you from?"

Mother wanted to answer, but the schoolmaster stopped her.

"Let the boy speak for himself. It was him I asked."

I felt flattered by the attention.

"From Studenitsa," I answered.

"Studenitsa?" the teacher repeated. "But how will you walk so far? It's a long way."

He raised his head and peered through narrowed eyes at the lofty Burkutova Mountain, with a motionless white cloud clinging to its summit.

"I'll live here," I said, and the last vestige of shyness vanished.

"Have you relations in Bystroye?"

"No, nobody."

"I'll come and live here myself," my mother said hastily, "if he can but go to school."

"How old are you, laddie?" asked the teacher.

"Six," I answered.

Kurtinets shook his head. "Six? It's early yet for school, he's too young."

"Nay, sir," my mother said quickly. "He's not so young. He's the man of the house already."

Kurtinets smiled at her, and began to ask about us, and listened with as much interest as though our life were not the same as that of any other Verkhovina family.

"Perhaps good fortune and happiness will come to him," said Mother, stroking my head.

"Time it did," remarked Kurtinets. "How much longer will people have to wait for it?"

A shadow fell over Mother's face.

"My father and mother hoped I'd have good fortune and happiness, sir, but it's never come."

"It will," said the teacher. "But not like that, not the way you think, not for one person alone. Even a tree,

if it grows alone, gets like that pine over there by the church—all twisted out of shape."

Kurtinets thought for a moment, looking at his big, work-roughened hands, then added suddenly: "Bring the boy in the autumn."

It did not fall to my lot to be taught by Kurtinets, however. In August I saw him in Studenitsa on the way to Svalyava, marching with a column of Verkhovina wood-cutters and shepherds, convoyed by mounted gendarmes. In Studenitsa more men were added to the column. Through the wattle fence I saw my chum Semyon's father, our neighbour Mikola Rushchak, bidding his wife farewell. The women wailed, the gendarmes shouted. The innkeeper Popsha, scrawny, short-legged and prematurely bald, slipped among the men carrying a bottle and glasses. Some drank and looked still gloomier, others got tipsy, bragged and shouted threats.

"Where are they going, Mum?" I asked.

"They're going to war, son," my mother told me. "The Emperor has declared war on Russia. . . ."

Kurtinets was very calm. He stood waiting in the shade of a beech-tree by the road, his black coat thrown over his shoulders; it was only when the gendarmes ordered the men to fall in that the schoolmaster came into the middle of the street and shouted in a voice that rose above all the hubbub and wailing: "Don't cry, women, we'll come back!"

3

We were told that we were not Russines at all, but Greek Catholic Magyars; and those Russians now at war with the German Kaiser and the Austro-Hungarian Emperor were our o'd-time enemies.

In church people frowned as they listened to the priest's sermons, and lowered their eyes. The congrega-

tion was mainly women and children. Of the men there were—the elder, nodding his agreement with the priest, Grandad Gritsan, Fyodor Skripka, and a few other old men.

Grandad Gritsan, standing near us, listened, sighed and whispered: "He lies, though it's a sin to say so. Forgive me, Mother of God."

I looked at the large image of the Virgin Mary. "Surely, surely now," I thought, "her lips will part and she will stop the preacher." But the Holy Virgin was silent, her eyes gazing somewhere high above the heads of the people, passionless, indifferent to everything, even to the infant in her arms.

It was three months since the war had started; it was raging somewhere far away, far from the forgotten mountain village of Studenitsa, spreading over half the world. For the present, however, we felt little of it.

Then one frosty October day lamentation shook Studenitsa.

"My Mikola. . . . Light of my eyes. . . ."

It was our neighbour Anna Rushchak. She was lying in the middle of her yard, the shawl pulled off her head, beating herself against the frozen earth.

Semyon, my chum, was sobbing with his face pressed to the wattle fence.

"Dad's been killed at the war," he told me through his tears.

I looked at Semyon, at his shaking body; I was at a loss and could find no word of comfort. Never before had he seemed so small and helpless.

Neighbours came running up and huddled by the gate, whispering, eyeing a slip of blue paper on the ground which had been brought by the elder. It was the first bitter tidings from the front.

A few days later the elder knocked at Grandad Gritsan's door with two slips—for two sons. . . . Then there

was weeping in the Skripka home. Killed, missing. Killed. Again missing. Most were reported missing.

There were fewer and fewer men to be seen in the village. The women's faces grew drawn and haggard with care and anxiety.

Semyon and I already understood the meaning of the word "missing." That was good news. It meant that the men had gone over to the Russians.

"Can't trust these people an inch," the village gendarmes said with curses. "They'll be up to something if they're not watched."

There were now several gendarmes in every village. Studenitsa had three. They prowled about the cottages and tried to get something out of us children. "Whom have you seen today? What do they say about the Emperor and the war?" they kept asking us.

We knew what was being said all right, but we held our tongues. If we let it out, the gendarmes would take our Studenitsa folk away to prison. They had taken plenty already from Verkhovina!

Bitter things were being said about the war, in every cottage curses were heaped on it. It bore down on the people like a heavy stone, crushing them to the very earth with grief and want. Semyon and I even had no wish to play at war.

The Bystroye school had been closed down, like all the others in Verkhovina where lessons were taught in our own language. In such hard times I thought Mother would abandon the idea of having me study. But she was not one to give up. Since there was no hope of a school, she sent me to Ilko Gorulya, the Bystroye schoolmaster's friend, to learn to read and write.

Where Gorulya himself had learned to read, I never knew.

He was a tall, wiry man of amazing strength, though he limped slightly on his left leg; his fair clipped mousa-

che and blue eyes stood out sharply against his sun-burned face.

Like many Verkhovina men, Gorulya had been driven from his own country by poverty, lack of land and lack of work and had spent long years wandering about the world in search of a living. He had worked as a bricklayer in Brazil, as a stevedore in the African ports of Jibuti and Alexandria, and as a collier in Belgian coal-mines. But finally, seeing that nowhere could he make a good living and being home-sick for the Carpathians, he returned to Studenitsa, where his wife Gafia was waiting for him.

Gorulya had a real gift for work. He could learn quickly the knack of any job and soon gain a mastery that was hard to rival. Few men in our region could fell a tree on the steepest and most dangerous slopes with such skill, or lay beams for a house so well and firmly, or make such excellent wooden tubs for carrying milk from the mountain pastures as Gorulya.

Gorulya had no land of his own, nor did he dream now of ever possessing any. Although he reckoned himself a village man, the years he had spent as a worker left their stamp on him. Both in his thoughts and deeds he was bolder and freer than the average villager. Whenever anybody mentioned him in the outlying country it would be: "That Ilko Gorulya, the workman from Studenitsa." There were many such workmen in the villages of Verkhovina in the days of my childhood.

In autumn, winter, and in spring Gorulya worked as wood-cutter, carpenter, or stonemason repairing roads. The work was never steady and this worried him. However, with the coming of summer, he would be chosen head shepherd by Studenitsa villagers, for at that job, too, a finer man than he could not be found. As for Ilko himself, the freedom of the upland pastures appealed to

him strongly, to say nothing of the steady income right up to the September frosts.

Gorulya's chief passion, however, was hunting; he had inherited this from his father, a famous bear-hunter who had taught his dangerous craft to his son when Ilko was still a youth. That was why Count Schönborn, when Ilko came to Studenitsa, engaged him as one of his game-keepers. It was while hunting for Schönborn that Gorulya injured his leg. As soon as he recovered, however, he went back and continued to serve the Count until he was driven out for his sharp tongue.

His tongue was indeed sharp, and his nature restive and recalcitrant. The slightest injustice roused him to anger, and since there was no lack of injustice in our parts, he seethed day in, day out. Gorulya had his own way of judging life and people; he respected boldness and intractability, and despised anyone who was submissive.

There was an old custom in Verkhovina. When there had been a death, and the whole village gathered in the evening to mourn, mummers came into the cottage—the Devil and Death. The Devil had a long cow's tail and the usual horns. Death rattled horse's teeth and flourished a scythe over the heads of the mourners. When he did this, the people had to bow their heads low. All night long the mummers danced round the coffin, slapping each other and clowning, to distract the relatives of the deceased with their antics.

The part of the Devil was taken in our village by Fyodor Skripka, and Death by Ilko Gorulya. It is hard to conceive where this stern, heavy-footed man found such a store of agility, reckless gaiety and sly mimicry. He took off the notary, the tax-collector or the innkeeper Popsha to the life.

People respected Gorulya, but feared him. There was only one person in the village who felt at ease with him

—my mother. When he met her, Gorulya became bashful and diffident, tried to speak mildly, and the mocking smile left his lips. Mother, too, was different on those occasions—losing the stern, severe look which she wore for other people.

Later, when I was older and began to understand things, I realized that it was ~~this~~ man my mother loved, and not my father to whom her parents had given her in marriage. And Gorulya loved her too, although he well knew that nothing could ever come of it.

Gorulya was not sent to war because of his lameness. He and his wife Gafia lived at the edge of the village, not far from us.

My heart missed a beat when Gorulya appeared in our cottage. He smiled, stroked my head, then went up to the table and glanced at the primer Mother had bought. In an instant my future teacher's face darkened, as though what he saw were not a primer but something evil. I stared at him, while my mother looked her unspoken question, wondering at this sudden change.

Finally he sat down on the bench and, with his head a little on one side, beckoned me to him. Mother's presence gave me courage and I went. Gorulya scanned me from head to foot, then asked with slow emphasis: "Who are you?"

I glanced at Mother helplessly, but she showed no sign of coming to my aid.

"Who are you?" Gorulya repeated.

"Ivan . . . Belinets," I blurted out and stood waiting uncomfortably. But Gorulya shook his head.

"That's not what I want to know," he said. "Tell me, are you German, or Magyar, or Slovak?"

"I'm a Russinel" I said quickly, surprised at Gorulya's ignorance.

"And what is the name of your country?"

"Verkhovina," I answered without stopping to think.

Gorulya smiled. I had never imagined that he could have such a kindly smile.

"Verkhovina is a province, Ivanko," he said. "The province where you were born. But our native country, all of it—what is that called?"

I knew what he was asking me. It was something that everybody knew who was born and grew up in our forest-clad mountains, where everything—from the names of the villages to the ancient, carefully preserved Slavonic church books, from old tales of the past to hopes for the future—everything was closely bound up with that name.

"*Ruska*," I said.

Where and when I had first heard it I could not say, nor could anybody else in Verkhovina. It was as though people in our parts were born with that word, born with all that it meant in thought and feeling, as people are born with the sense of warmth and light and love for one's mother. I was not yet ten, but I knew that over the mountains, where the sun rose, lay our own boundless land, from which we had been torn away in times long past; I knew that people there spoke the same tongue as ours; I also knew how dangerous it was to speak the name of that land in the presence of the gendarme, the elder or the tax-collector.

"*Ruska*, you say, eh?" said Gorulya and turned to Mother. "You hear what the lad says, Maria?"

"I hear it." My mother nodded.

"And what sort of a primer have you got him?" asked Gorulya reproachfully, barely containing himself as he leafed through the book. "Latin script. . . Haven't we any primers of our own?"

My mother sighed. "There used to be some, but you can't buy them now. Popsha says the gendarmes burned all the ones in Russian and ordered folks to sell those instead."

"I know that, I know they burned them," said Gorulya angrily. "But I'm not going to teach him from this. . . ."

He dived into the pocket of his jacket, pulled out something in a coloured kerchief and began to unwrap it, disclosing an old, dog-eared book. He put it on the table and smoothed it lovingly with his palm.

"This is our own writing, lad," he said solemnly. "And this is what you shall learn from."

Most teachers began with the initial letters of the alphabet; Gorulya started in the middle. The first word which I spelled out in syllables, the first which I traced with my pencil, was the word "Russia."

As soon as I could read a little, laboriously following the words syllable by syllable, Mother began hunting for books wherever she could and bringing them home. They were torn and ragged, their edges black from much handling, and their content was invariably religious, for no others existed. These books were soon the bane of my life. Mother made me read them till my head ached. I would sit by the window in our cottage, following the lines with my finger and drawling out the syllables, while the other boys were making snow hills. If I stopped reading for just a moment to glance out, Mother would reproach me.

"Staring out of the window again? Get on with your reading!"

Only the fall of dusk saved me. Then Mother became kind and affectionate again. We went to bed early without lighting the lamp, because it saved a meal, and under the sheepskins we were warm and did not have to use up wood for a fire.

Sleep would not come at once, however, and Mother would tell me stories about the wicked, sly Pesigolovets,¹ how he stole the key of our land from Mikola of the Black

¹ A giant with a dog's head from Carpathian folk tales.—*Ed.*

Mountain and hurled it to the end of the Earth. But Mikola killed the Pesigolovets in single combat and then set off in search of the key.

Mother always went into great detail when she told her stories; she gave the fullest description of the Pesigolovets, and particularly of the shepherd Mikola of the Black Mountain, who seemed, somehow, to resemble Ilko Gorulya.

"And ever since that day he has been seeking the key," said Mother's unhurried voice, "looking under every bush and in every crevice, and meanwhile the land lies locked. . . ."

"What if he finds it, Mother?" I asked. "What will happen then?"

"He'll unlock Verkhovina," said Mother, "and people will never have to die of hunger again."

"And they won't have to go to war for the Emperor?"

"God grant it."

I saw the key in a dream. It was lying among the boulders in a river-bed, and I shouted at the top of my voice: "There it is! There it is!"

Mother nudged me with her elbow.

"Be quiet! What are you making all that noise for?"

In May the flock was assembled to go to the upland pastures. People marked their sheep with special paint that did not wash off easily, and mended the milk-tubs. In former days this had always been a gay, boisterous time in the village. Drinks would go round, and it was the custom for each man to treat the head shepherd Gorulya to a glass of brandy. But now, with the war on, the people felt gloomy.

To avoid a break in my lessons, Mother sent me up to the pastures with Gorulya. There I spent the summer, studying and helping him with odd jobs. But in spite of all my mother's efforts, my lessons did stop.

I had already noticed that Gorulya's mind was not on our lessons; it was as though he were waiting for something to happen. He paid no attention to my mistakes, and when I appeared punctually in his cottage, he would look at me in surprise and say absently: "Ah... it's you, Ivanko." Thereupon he would at once forget my existence and lose himself in his thoughts.

Several times he left me alone with my book and disappeared. I waited for him till darkness fell, and then strolled quietly home; I never told Mother anything of all this.

One morning late in autumn the bell of the Studenitsa church set up a loud, agitated pealing. We ran to the window and through the wet, falling snow saw people hurrying towards the church.

Mother grew worried and anxious.

"You stay indoors," she told me sternly. "See you don't set foot outside! Anything may happen at times like these!"

She threw a shawl over her shoulders and ran out of the cottage.

I waited for a little while, then slipped out, too, and ran to the church. There I climbed the old belfry and hid behind the beams, hoping that Mother would not see me.

The whole village had gathered. The bell stopped ringing, and a stranger appeared on the porch. He wore a leather jacket and a long axe was thrust into his broad wood-cutter's belt.

"Good people!" he shouted, pulling off his hat. "A great revolution has swept Russia! No more lords and gentry! The workers and peasants are in power! The people have got peace and land..."

Mounted gendarmes without any great-coats on, their jackets unfastened, were already galloping from the village to the church. Nobody else seemed to see them, and knowing the danger threatening the wood-cutter, I

jumped down from the tower, my heart in my throat, pushed and wriggled through the crowd to the porch, and cried:

"*Vuiku*,¹ the gendarmes!... Quick, *Vuiku*!"

"I see 'em, laddie," cried the wood-cutter kindly, jumped down from the steps and disappeared in the crowd like a drop of water in a bucketful.

The gendarmes were scattering the crowds but no power could stop the news of the great revolution in Russia from spreading. It swept through the whole of Verkhovina like wild-fire.

A change had come over our village. On the surface, it is true, everything seemed the same, but some invisible strand was drawn taut to the point of breaking. One could sense this tension in everything—in the excited, perturbed whispers, in the gendarmes making their rounds in groups of five or six instead of in twos, in Popsha's cautious early closing of the inn, in the eager impatience with which people awaited and snatched up every scrap of news from neighbouring villages or the town.

"Re-vo-lu-tion," I repeated the unfamiliar word to myself. I did not know what it meant, but I heard it spoken constantly—it became as common a word as "bread" or "Mum." I felt that it held something menacing, yet at the same time right and just. I pestered my mother to explain.

"Mum, what does a revolution mean?"

"You're too young to understand."

"No, I'm not, Mum. Tell me."

She scolded me, but at last explained it as well as she could.

"When there are no more gentry, when they're driven away from their manors and their land is divided among the people—that's revolution."

¹ *Vuiku* (Uncle)—In local dialect a form of address used by children and young people to older men.—*Tr.*

"But isn't that good, Mum?"

"Hush, quiet," she warned me. "The gendarmes may hear you."

I was silent, but not for long.

"Will we have that here, Mum? Will we get land, too?"

"Be quiet, be quiet," she whispered. "The Holy Mother grant it!"

Many years have passed since that time when I was only a youngster, yet I can still see before me our mountain road, white with the dust of summer. From the high pastures where Gorulya and I tended the sheep, we could follow it as it descended from the pass like a waterfall, then wound down through the wooded lower slopes until it came to the river and followed its course to the misty distances that merged with the sky. I knew that this was the plain, with the Danube and the Tisza, but to me it seemed like the end of the world.

We could see the mountain road, and we could see the people travelling along it. There were many of them at that time—some in carts, some on foot, walking in groups. Austrians, Russines, Hungarians—in greenish great-coats and service caps with the cockades ripped off and in many cases replaced by strips of scarlet cloth.

These were prisoners of war returning home after the Brest Peace.

People came out of the villages to meet them. Gorulya allowed me to go down sometimes, and he himself disappeared for days at a time, seeking acquaintances among the home-comers.

"Good day and good health, brothers!"

"The same to you!"

"Where are you from?"

"From over there," one of the men would say, not without a feeling of importance.

There was no need for any further explanation. In an instant an eager group surrounded the man, shouting:

"What's it like over there?"

"Over there folks are free!" the man would say, wiping the sweat from his stubbled face on his sleeve. "No more gentry, and the land and the factories belong to the people!"

How many times had they heard it, and still it was hard to grasp.

"The people have the land . . . it's true, not just talk, friend?"

"Talk, do you say?" the man would reply with an angry snort. He would snatch off his cap, turn back the lining, muttering, and pull out a newspaper, worn with much handling. "Here, who can read? Take that and tell folk what's in it! Only be careful with it, it's got a long way to go yet!"

Once it was I who took one of these worn, tattered sheets, for nobody else in the crowd could read. I read loudly, as they asked, but badly; I found the small print hard to make out and stuttered with nervousness. People listened quietly, seriously, patiently, and forgave me my bad reading.

It was the newspaper *Pravda* with Lenin's speeches on peace and on land.

When I had finished, a sturdy, sinewy old man standing beside me took the paper and turned it about, looking at it from all sides; then he said to another:

"What do you say, neighbour—how would that suit us here?"

"No question about that," was the reply. "Just what we need! God grant we get it, too!"

"No good waiting for God," laughed the war prisoner, putting the paper away. "We've got to get it ourselves. I've seen how it's done."

With that he resumed his journey. Others followed him—Hungarians and Austrians; and they too had Russian newspapers and leaflets which they were taking home.

"Listen, friend," our village people would say, "leave us a paper. It's written in our language, your people won't understand it. Can't you see? It's our language!"

"It's our language too," the men would answer. "Our language!" and nobody would leave one.

The words heard on the roads in those days were not forgotten, and their glow did not fade. People carried them in their hearts like a sacred flame, and lying wakeful at night, would say: "Why shouldn't we have it as they have in Russia?"

Among the war prisoners marched soldiers who had slung their rifles over their shoulders and left the trenches. On the passes and cross-roads gendarmes tried to take away their rifles, but instead, the soldiers disarmed the gendarmes and gave the weapons to the Verkhovina people.

At railway stations, inns and village elders' offices, the people tore the fly-specked portraits of the Emperor to shreds, smashed the imperial coat of arms with their rifle-butts and burned the shackling records of debts and fines and taxes before the eyes of the panic-stricken notaries.

The authorities sent fresh groups of gendarmes along with machine-guns into the mountains, hoping that these might get the situation in hand. Whereupon the soldiers and war prisoners left the high roads and made their way by herdsmen's tracks through the pastures and forests.

I met some six men in the woods below our pasture when I was returning with a sack of salt for which Gorulya had sent me to the village. They came out from a side-path and halted. I stopped too, staring at the armed strangers.

"Hey, lad!" called a thick-set soldier with a black beard. "Is it far to Bystroye?"

"It's a long way yet."

"Isn't there any short cut?"

I shook my head, still staring at the bearded soldier. There seemed to be something familiar about him, something in his face and voice that awakened memories; suddenly it came back to me and I went up to him boldly.

"I know you!"

"How's that?"

"You're the Bystroye schoolmaster, aren't you?"

"Quite right!" said the soldier gaily. "I've been a teacher once. And who may you be?"

"I'm Ivan, son of Maria Belinets, from Studenitsa."

Kurtinets wrinkled his forehead, trying to remember.

"Were you in my school?"

"No," I said. "Mother brought me to you, but you told us to wait till autumn, and in the autumn they sent you to the war."

"I remember, indeed I do," said Kurtinets. "Well, good day to you, Ivan Belinets." He held out his hand to me. "So it's a long way yet to Bystroye? I never took this road before."

"It's not so very far," I replied, sorry for Kurtinets. "But you needn't go there. Your old man died some three years ago, and your wife and boy went down to the lowland, I think somewhere near Mukachevo."

A shadow fell on Kurtinets' face. He stood for a moment thinking and rubbing his bearded chin.

"When did they go?"

"They buried the old man, then they lived there a little and after that they went," I answered.

"And Ilko Gorulya—do you know him?" Kurtinets asked after a pause.

"I do. Of course I do! Come along, I'll take you to him, he's on the pasture."

They stood for a long time before the shepherd's hut, hugging each other, shaking each other by the shoulders; it seemed funny to see grown-up men behaving like that, especially men like Gorulya and Bystroye's former schoolmaster.

The shepherds gathered, the soldiers removed their crumpled knapsacks and their rifles, but Gorulya and Kurtinets still stood where they met.

"Back from captivity?"

"That's not the right word."

"From freedom, then?"

"That's more like it."

They went into the hut; I followed and slid into a corner. Kurtinets sat down on the pallet of fragrant hay and began unlacing his heavy army boots. Gorulya squatted by the wall, never taking his eyes off his friend.

"I've been asking about you everywhere!" said Gorulya. "I went to the road to look for you, and told others to look too." He was going to say more but stopped, frowned and added: "Have you been to Bystroye?"

Kurtinets' hands trembled as he unrolled the dusty leggings round his feet.

"What's happened there to my folk?" he asked.

"The old man died. . . ."

"I know that. But why did my wife leave?"

Gorulya rose, then squatted down on his heels again.

"That cur of an elder got her out. And they sold the cottage by auction."

"Was the law on their side?" asked Kurtinets, surprised and angry. Gorulya laughed bitterly.

"They find a law quick enough when they want to make short work of someone. The cur brought a paper saying there were tax arrears not paid. A debt."

"And was there any debt?" asked Kurtinets sombrely.

"Folks said there wasn't," Gorulya shrugged. "But folks are one thing and the elder with his seal's another." There was a moment's silence.

"And my Maria and Olexa—where are they now?" asked Kurtinets. "The lad here said they'd gone to some place near Mukachevo."

"Near Mukachevo, that's right," Gorulya said. "I know who she's working for, and I saw your boy last winter. . . ."

Kurtinets' face brightened.

"Big, is he?"

"Big enough," said Gorulya and after a moment's hesitation added: "but weakly like."

"How do you mean?" asked Kurtinets anxiously.

"He's sickly, I don't know what holds his soul and body together." Then regretting his words, Gorulya began comforting the saddened man: "Don't get fretting, the Lord grant, and the laddie'll straighten out yet."

"And Maria—is it hard for her at that place there?"

"She didn't say anything," Gorulya shrugged again. "Eh, I'd like to tie all the gentry together with a rope and——"

"I wanted to know what Gorulya would have done with the gentry, but he stopped short, only bringing his fist down on his knee so hard that he winced with pain.

"You've got real bitter, I see," Kurtinets observed.

Gorulya's eyes flashed. "You think I'm the only one? What with the war and want, all the sap's been sucked out of people, they're like the forest in a drought—drop a spark and it'll flare up."

"So the time's come here too," said Kurtinets. "Fine! May it be a good strong blaze!"

Kurtinets spent the morning on the pasture with the shepherds, then he and Gorulya went down to the woodcutters and did not return until late at night.

Half asleep, I could hear Kurtinets telling Gorulya

something, speaking of the railway and Mukachevo, and people I did not know. Later, when they had finished, Gorulya came up to where I was lying and bent down over me.

"Are you asleep, Ivanko?"

"No, I'm awake," I mumbled.

"Then listen. Go home tomorrow and tell your mother that I won't have time to teach you any more now. Understand? Tell her from me." Having said this, Gorulya went back to the fire.

I sat up and stared at the men sitting round the camp-fire.

"Why hasn't he got time now?" I wondered. "Maybe he is going away. . . . But he's gone away before, and he didn't say he hadn't time to teach me."

My head was in a whirl, but the excitement of the day had tired me out and I was soon fast asleep.

When I woke up in the morning there was no sign of Kurtinets and his companions, nor of Gorulya.

I went out of the hut and saw old Grandad Vasil Gritsan busy about the sheep-pen.

"Where have they gone, Grandad?" I asked.

The old man—thin, erect, with eyes clear as mountain streams—looked at me and pointed down the path.

"They've gone away . . . to win a better life for you, lad."

* * *

Another vivid memory.

This was in the autumn of 1919.

It is only now that I can understand what that long-past year meant for our Carpathian region.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire had collapsed, fallen apart like a jacket sewn with rotten thread.

Bonfires burned on the mountain tops. They glowed in the night, summoning people from the villages and

hamlets to a great rally. Hutsul¹ raftsmen, Svalyava wood-cutters, farm-labourers from the valleys, peasants from Verkhovina and shepherds, with their families made their way to the place of assembly. One after another, unhurriedly, they stepped into the circle before the mass gathering.

"I am Mikhaïlo Petelitsa of Paseka. My will is to be with the Ukraine, our mother, for ever and ever."

"So be it!" came the reply from hundreds of throats.

People felt the long-awaited time had at last come; surely no power on earth could prevent them from reaching their cherished goal.

Soviet power had been set up in Hungary—a Red island in the heart of Europe. In our own parts, the red banner with the hammer and sickle floated over the elders' headquarters in Studenitsa, Bystroye and many other upland places.

The village elders had fled, and committees elected by the people sat in their offices and managed village affairs. This was where preparations were made for dividing up the land, this was where men volunteered for the Russine Red Guard, among them Kurtinets and Gorulya.

But the people's great hopes were not to be realized. In the Ukraine civil war broke out, and cunning lawyers, priests and rich peasants, vowing love for the people, gained control of the people's council in the town of Chust, where delegates had gathered from all the towns and villages to sign a manifesto declaring our will to reunite with the Ukraine. These usurpers sent their deputation across the mountains, not to the Soviet Government, as the people wished and expected, but to Semyon Petlyura, head of the counter-revolutionary nationalist government which had temporarily seized power in the Ukraine.

¹ The name given to Ukrainians living in the eastern part of the Carpathians.—*Tr.*

Young Soviet Hungary was drowned in blood by troops dispatched by King Ferdinand of Rumania and Beneš of Czechia. The Russine Red Guard was defeated on the Tisza and split up into small groups, trying vainly to make their way east across the mountains.

It was then that the soldiers, not ashamed to call themselves "Czech legionaries of democracy," herded us out of the village. With the blessing of President Wilson of the United States and Christ's Vicar on earth, the Pope, they had overrun our region.

There were no men left in Studenitsa. The women, the children and the old men were driven out of their cottages on to the road.

It was a clear, bright day, but so cold that even our long-hardened bare feet were chilled.

I walked between my mother and Grandad Gritsan. My mother's face was pale and stony. The old man's feet dragged and his back was bent; his eyes watered with the cold and the fixed intensity of his gaze.

A group of officers and soldiers, along with the Studenitsa and Bystroye elders, were waiting for us under a tree by the mill. But our eyes passed them over and sought something a little further away. Four bodies were lying by the side of the road. The legs were stretched out, motionless, the heads thrown back in an unnatural position. I could not believe that one of these was Kurtinets.

Two days before a group of Red Guards with gendarmes in hot pursuit had brought him to the village, gravely wounded and bleeding.

It was impossible to carry him any further; there was nothing to do but conceal him in some safe spot, leaving three of the men to guard him.

Only Gorulya's wife Gafia, and Grandad Gritsan, who gave the dying man some drug prepared from herbs, knew where he lay hidden.

In the morning Czech legionaries marched into Studenitsa. The village elder Stefan Ovsak met them by the inn, and knowing himself to be safe, invited the officer in command to his cottage. Anxious to curry favour, he lost no time.

"The Reds came here late last night," he said, "and I saw them carrying a stretcher; but there was no stretcher when they went away. They must have left somebody in the village."

All day long the soldiers searched Studenitsa; they ransacked every cottage, every shed, but found nothing. It was only late next day that they happened upon the tumble-down shed by the mill. When they looked in, they were met with rifle fire.

For over an hour we could hear the shooting by the mill. We were forbidden to leave our houses, and through the window I could see the patrols marching up and down the street, looking about them fearfully.

The shooting ceased only when the Red Guards had run out of cartridges. Even then the soldiers feared to enter. It was the wealthy men of the village, the Ovsak brothers, and the Bystroye elder with his three sons, who finally broke in with their axes. They had all crawled away somewhere when the red banner had been raised over the village elders' offices, but now, with the arrival of the soldiers, they had come out again. Drunk with rage and plum brandy, they begged the officer to let them deal with the Reds in their own way.

"As a soldier, I cannot give you that permission," he replied. "But... I needn't do anything to stop you."

He turned on his heel and marched away from the shed.

... Now four bodies, the faces oaked with dried blood, were lying by the roadside, and the village folk were driven there to look at them and tremble.

The closer we came to the dead men, the slower and heavier our steps grew. Mother's arm was round my shoulders, and she pressed me to her as though to shield me from misfortune. The officer shouted something to the soldiers conveying us, and they moved away from the crowd. Then a stout, long-legged man in a rain-coat and short baggy trousers drawn in below the knees ran out from the group of officers, elders and strangers in city clothes, waiting for us under the tree. After him trotted pop-eyed elder Ovsak. The long-legged man was holding a queer, black, shining box. He would put his eyes to it, move back, shuffle his feet and suddenly squat down.

Mother, Grandad Gritsan and the others faltered and stopped, looking at each other in alarm.

"What are you stopping for?" shouted Ovsak. "Can't you see that the editor has come all the way from America to take our pictures? Please, good people, don't stand there, go on, and a bit more lively. . . . And don't keep staring at him, look at those. . . ." And he jerked his head towards the dead men.

Nobody moved.

Then the officer and soldiers took a hand. We were driven forward, then backward, then forward again. The American kept running from one place to another, then turned the handle of his film-camera, said something to the elder, which Ovsak, who had lived in America for ten years, translated.

At last the camera stopped whirring. The American strode up to us and started pushing people about here and there without ceremony, as though he were looking for somebody, until his eyes fell on Grandad Gritsan. He slapped the old man on the shoulder and led him out. Then the American began talking to Ovsak. The elder listened carefully, nodded, and turned to the old man.

"Grandad! The editor wants to give you a dollar. Do you know what a dollar is? It's American money."

"I know," Gritsan said. "But why does he want to give it me? Has he too many for himself?"

"No, he's not got too many," Ovsak said uncomfortably. "But for that dollar, Grandad, you must go and spit on those Red criminals there. . . ."

Saying the last word the elder stepped back with an apprehensive look.

Grandad said nothing. There was dead silence. Mother pressed me to her more closely. All eyes were on Gritsan—what would he say?

The old man raised his pale, watery eyes, and their gaze passed slowly over the people standing round him.

"I won't take his money, Stefan," said the old man at last. "It would be sinful, and you can tell him so. But spit—that I will."

Grandad took a step forward, stopped and spat—straight into the face of the visitor from overseas.

* * *

The soldiers left Studenitsa in a few days, certain that everything would now be quiet in our parts.

There was a heavy silence in the village. Even in their cottages people talked in whispers; even Grandad Gritsan, beaten nearly to death, lay silently, with never a groan or complaint, when Mother and I came to see him.

The soldiers left, and in the dead of night the Ovsak farm in Studenitsa and the elder's farm in Bystroye went up in a blaze.

The fires started simultaneously in the farm-houses, the sheds and at the wattle fence. Nobody went to put them out, and that was even more fearful than the conflagrations themselves.

The light of the flames shone in through our window. I was lying quietly in the corner of the bed, Mother was standing by the stove, with Gorulya sitting on the

bench beside the window. He sagged heavily over the table, his long arms and clenched fists stretched out.

Gorulya had knocked at the door half an hour before, and when Mother opened it, warned her not to make a light.

"Don't be alarmed, Maria," he said, sinking down on the bench. "I'll sit here with you a while, then I'll go."

Mother said nothing to that. She went over to the stove and stood there leaning against it.

"Where have you been?" she asked quietly. "Are you really alive?"

Gorulya laughed grimly.

"I'm not quite sure. . . . We fought two days at the pass. . . . Seventeen of us, and they were a hundred. . . . I'm sick at heart, Maria, burning and sick. . . ."

"It's all over then, Ilko?"

"Never say that word," said Gorulya. "When one tree is felled, another grows in its place."

In the darkness I could hear his fists crash down on the table.

Mother broke the silence.

"Have you at least been home? Gafia's like a crazed thing."

"I know. I was there."

Again silence. Suddenly a dog howled in the distance, another answered it nearer at hand, then the puppy in the next yard started yapping and whining, and the small window changed from black to rose as though dawn were breaking.

Mother caught her breath, startled, and darted for the door, but Gorulya stopped her.

"Sit quiet, Maria, that's the Ovsaks' place burning. . . ."

He said this in a steady, composed voice, without even glancing at the window.

Mother came back from the door and leaned against the stove again.

It was quite light in the room. Gorulya and Mother said nothing. Gorulya was haggard and long unshaven.

"Maria," he said suddenly, without looking up. "Do you mind the day, Maria, when we came down from the pastures? It was spring, midday, and the sun was shining after the rain. . . ."

"Why do you talk of that now?" my mother asked sternly.

"God alone knows why. . . . It's burning up well. A grand blaze!"

He rose noisily, abruptly.

"I'm going, Maria."

"Where will you go now?"

There was such great fear in my mother's voice that Gorulya, who had already taken a step towards the door, stopped and turned again. For a moment they stood looking at each other, Gorulya and my mother.

"I can't stop here in the village now," said Gorulya at last. "I'll go somewhere Rakhov way. I'll bide a bit there, and then I'll come back. . . ."

It was almost a year later, in the summer, that Gorulya returned. He was silent, dour, and more bitter than ever.

4

The winter of 1920 was a particularly hungry one in Verkhovina. The previous summer had been one of rain and fog, and the peasants barely got back the seed they had put into the ground.

It was a grim, terrible year for the whole of Verkhovina, but in the chronicles of our village it did not go by

the usual name of "cruel" or "hungry." It was "the year when Petro Matlakh came back from America."

As for me, I can remember not only the year when Matlakh returned, but the very day. This is how it was.

Easter Week was just over, with its church services, its painted eggs, and the shouting and brawling by the inn. The festive spirit had been dampened by the heavy mists hanging thickly over the mountains. They had eaten up the snow earlier than usual, leaving none even in the sheltered hollows, and the earth looked shrivelled and pitiful.

Just after Easter the innkeeper Popsha, whose floors Mother scrubbed, had business in the village of Volovets, twelve miles from Studenitsa.

"Look you here, Maria," he said to my mother the day before he left. "Maybe you'll let your lad come along with me, to look after the horses. I'll give you a bag of salt for it."

Mother agreed, and as for me, I was so wild with joy over the trip that I could not wait, but ran off to brag to my friends.

My best friend was still Semyon Rushchak, a tow-headed, thrifty lad. The Rushchaks' cottage was full of women—two grandmothers, the mother and three sisters. After his father's death, Semyon was the only man of the house. Nobody sat down to table till he came, nothing was settled without him. When he was eight he could work in the fields, mend the fences, grind oats at the mill—and keep his eyes open to see that the miller did not cheat him. He never wasted a thing. A nail found on the road, a horse's hair—everything he picked up and brought home.

"There's a good farmer growing up," folk said.

Spurred by the praise, he worked harder than ever. He never wasted an hour, but always found some

job about the place. He even walked with a kind of heavy dignity, imitating his father, and spoke in a gruff voice.

My other friend, the one I think I liked best, was the Matlakhs' nursemaid Olenka, nine years old. She had come to Studenitsa a year before that happy day when I was to go to Volovets—small, black-haired, with flashing dark eyes.

Petro Matlakh was a peasant of medium substance who had gone to America before the war to make money, leaving his wife heavy with child. When her son was born and grew up a little, she hired a girl from a near-by village to come and look after him in return for food and some bits of clothing to her back. Olenka not only minded the baby, however—she tended the two cows, fetched water up from the river at the bottom of the hill, and gathered fire-wood in the forest. Whenever you passed the Matlakh cottage, you could hear them calling:

"Olenka! . . . Olenka! . . ."

I don't remember the first time Semyon and I set eyes on Olenka, or why she took our fancy so, but we both spent the next day prowling round the Matlakh place. From then on, the three of us were fast friends.

Olenka was the same good friend to both of us, showing no preference for one or the other, and we prized her friendship dearly.

These were the two whom I ran to tell of my trip to Volovets.

"Oh, Ivanko," said Olenka, and her black eyes widened with alarm. "That's a long, long way!"

"It's a good bit, of course," I said importantly, and slid a glance at the humble, envious Semyon.

"Maybe it's farther away than America?" Olenka asked again.

"What do you think!" cried Semyon scornfully. "First you come to America, and then go on to Volovets."

I could see through Semyon. I understood why he said that—he was eager to show Olenka how much he knew. But she did not even glance at poor, suffering Semyon. She had eyes only for me, and afraid I might come to some harm, she asked in a whisper that sent a shiver down my back: "But aren't you afraid, Ivanko? All that way! What if you meet some Pesigolovets on the road?"

"What if I do?" I laughed. "Nothing to be afraid of, with Popsha there!"

Olenka sighed and said no more. But late in the evening, when I was chopping wood for the stove, I heard a timid voice calling:

"Ivanko!"

I looked round, but saw nobody.

Again the timid voice called me, and only then did I see two eyes gleaming through the wattles of the fence in the darkness.

"Olenka!"

"Come here, Ivanko!"

I went to the fence, my heart beating with a quiet joy I had never felt before.

"Oh, Ivanko," said Olenka in her high bird-like voice. "I ran so fast, ever so fast! . . . And all the time I was afraid the Matlakh woman would be looking for me. . . . Here, I've brought this for you. . . ."

She found my hand and pressed into it a piece of rag with something soft and springy inside. It gave off a delicate fragrance like the pastures at dusk, making me imagine that it was not a cloth but a bunch of wild flowers and grasses that Olenka had given me.

"Take it, do take it," said Olenka, "it's for you. The Pesigolovets can't touch you, and there'll be a blessing on your journey if you have those herbs in your bosom. Grandad Gritsan told me I must pick them at dusk and wrap them in a white cloth. I went to the Yellow Rock. . . ."

Up there . . . that's where I got them. . . . Little herbs they are with blossoms. . . . Grandad Gritsan knows a lot of things like that."

She spoke quickly, breathlessly, and I thought I could hear her heart beating.

"Only, Ivanko, you mustn't ever tell anyone about the herbs," Olenka whispered. "And don't unwrap the cloth, you hear? Or the charm will be broken. . . . Nobody must know about the herbs."

"All right," I said. "But wasn't Grandad Gritsan afraid to tell you?"

"He was, but I carried his water up from the stream for it."

A shrill voice in the distance broke through the silence.

"Olenka-a-a. . . . Where've you got to?"

Olenka jumped, and the sparkle died out of her eyes.

"The woman's missed me," she said cheerlessly. "I must go now, Ivanko; put the herbs under your shirt, next to your heart, and keep them there all the time. . . ." Having said this, she ran quickly away from the fence.

At dawn I climbed happily into the trap behind Popsha, and the well-fed horses set off at a spanking pace. Popsha's bright-yellow trap with its good springs and comfortable seats was the only one in the district. It had once belonged to the priest, but he had lost it in a game of cards at the inn in a single night's carouse.

I looked eagerly round at the new countryside we passed, but I never for a minute forgot the herbs under my shirt. It may have been fancy, but it seemed as though even through the thick wool of my jacket I could smell their faint fragrance.

We spent a day and a night in Volovets. Popsha went about his business—thin, stooping, with that look of being always at your service. As for me, I had to stop with the horses. I fed them, and was thoroughly bored, and heart-

ily glad when we set off on the return journey the next morning.

About three miles from Volovets, we overtook a man walking by the side of the road. He wore an old brown town suit with large checks, and a hard straw hat with a black ribbon. On his back was a sagging half-empty Verkhovina knapsack, and blunt-toed tan boots, tied together by the laces, were slung over one shoulder.

On hearing the sound of wheels, the traveller turned.

"Mother of God!" cried Popsha, pulling up the horses. "It can't be Petro Matlakh come back from America! Is it you, Petro?"

"It's me, neighbour, it's me all right," the man said. "Good health to you!" His smile was so crooked that it seemed to give him actual pain.

Then even I recognized Petro Matlakh who had gone to make money in America just before the war. At first I thought he had not changed at all; he had the same puffy face, thin black hair and tiny eyes. But as I went on looking, I felt that there was some kind of change all the same; it was not that he was older, no, it was something tricky and sly in his manner, and his poking head on a thin neck was thrust still farther forward, which made it look as though he were sniffing for something.

"Like the Pesigolovets," I thought. "A real Pesigolovets!"

"We didn't think you'd be back so soon," drawled Popsha, shaking hands with Matlakh.

"Not so soon at that! Six years!"

"It all depends on how fortune uses you," said Popsha and looked at Matlakh as though he were sounding him out.

Matlakh gave his crooked smile.

"I've seen that fortune, yes, and seen all I want. I've had my bellyfull"

The innkeeper scratched his bald head under his cap. "I see, I see. So you've come back empty, have you?"

"An empty pot can be dearer than a full one," Matlakh answered evasively.

"How do I take that?"

"Any way you like."

"And there's your good woman thinking you'll build a new house and buy some land..."

"As God wills," Matlakh sighed. "We are all in his hands."

"Well, shall I give you a lift, eh?"

"How much, neighbour?"

"The same as everyone else; ten to the village, eleven to the house."

"Make it cheaper," said Matlakh.

"That I can't. It's all uphill, a hard pull for the horses. Anyone else would take fifteen."

"What about five?"

"Are you crazy, neighbour? Five's only to the Woodman's Bridge."

"I'll walk to the bridge then," said Matlakh.

He shifted the boots slung over his shoulder and tramped on, one hand on the edge of the trap.

For some minutes Matlakh said nothing; Popsha too was silent, and gave his attention to the reins. At last the innkeeper asked: "Why did you never write to your good woman, Petro, only sent her word with Vasil Grabarev?"

"Why waste money on stamps?" Matlakh said with a shrug. "Alive and well—and thank God for that!"

"That's true enough," Popsha agreed.

"Well, and how's things here?"

Popsha sighed. "Like after a fire. But it's got a bit quieter now, thank God. . . . In Uzhgorod there's a governor—Grigori Zhatkovich. A Russine, I've heard tell, one of your Americans."

"That's right," Matlakh answered. "I sailed from New York on the same ship with him. Zhatkovich and his councillors up above, and me—a bit lower."

Popsha fidgeted on his seat with impatient curiosity.

"You know him, do you?"

"I know him. They say he was a lawyer, worked for a big firm—General Motors. Have you heard of such?"

"No, I can't say as I have."

"You will, then. A great firm it is, a devil of a great firm!" cried Matlakh admiringly. "Well, Mr. Wilson, that's the American President, he heard of Zhatkovich, talked for a while, and then chose him to come here and be the governor."

Popsha shrugged.

"But why should that fellow Wilson choose our governor for us, neighbour? What will he get out of it? It's all the same to me, but couldn't we have chosen one ourselves?"

Matlakh laughed ironically.

"They need a good businessman here, it's that kind of place."

Popsha still persisted.

"Nobody's ever thought of us before, maybe didn't even know about us, and now here's the American President himself thinking about us!"

"Not about you," said Matlakh, changing his knapsack to his other hand. "Why should he think about you? The Bolsheviks aren't so far off, and roads go there across our mountains."

"And that's a true word," said Popsha. "But if I was President Masaryk, neighbour, I wouldn't like it. A stranger made innkeeper in my inn!"

Matlakh gave Popsha a sly glance.

"And if the inn isn't yours? Say—it's in your name, and you serve the drinks, but the boss is someone else?"

"Nay, how's that, neighbour?" Popsha shrugged again. "I spoke of the inn just as an example like, but here it's two different countries, and each one settles its own affairs."

"Settles its own affairs," Matlakh said grinning. "Neighbour, I know America, I know it through and through. Eh, that's what I call power! They know how to do business! They get control, lay their hands on something and it's theirs before you know how it's happened!"

He laughed, then broke off with that look of sniffing at something.

"How's the grain going?" he asked suddenly.

"It's a bad spring. . . . The old folks say there'll be no crops."

"Another cruel winter."

"Mother of God forbid!"

"What's that to you, neighbour? You've got your inn, bad times is a gift from Heaven for you."

Matlakh pierced Popsha with a heavy, unwinking stare. The innkeeper fidgeted on his seat.

"You people're all like that," he said meekly. "Do good to folks, grudge no strength or time to help them in cruel days, and they turn on you. . . . But Christ himself who came to man with goodness in his heart was crucified on Calvary. That is my consolation."

"Better leave the Good Lord out of it," said Matlakh, skirting a pool on the road. "He's nothing to do with it, there's a place for him and there's a place for the money. Well, and if it's so hard to do good, why do you keep on trying?"

"I wouldn't," cried Popsha. "But when there's no grain, they come themselves—help us out!—and I can't refuse 'em!"

Matlakh let out such a roar of laughter that the horses took fright and jerked the trap forward. He stopped,

however, as suddenly as he had started, and began asking Popsha the prices of maize and of land. About his wife, however, and how she had got on while he was away in America, he did not ask a word.

The trap rattled over the Woodman's Bridge. Below roared the rushing mountain stream, deep and noisy with the spring flood-water. The bridge trembled and hummed with the force of the stream, and spatters of foam scattered in all directions.

"Well, neighbour, get in," Popsha said, turning to Matlakh.

"Nay," said Matlakh. "I might as well walk the rest of the way now."

"Aren't your feet tired?"

"They're tired right enough," Matlakh admitted frankly. "But feet ache and then they stop, while if you take money out of your pocket you don't put it back again."

The innkeeper grunted. Even among the close-fisted villagers, Matlakh had always been notorious for his stinginess. He was moderately well off for our parts, he had land, a couple of oxen and a tumble-down, leaky cottage put up by his grandfather. Another man would have built himself a new one, but Matlakh lived on patiently in the old place, buying—now a sheep, now a sow, and saving and sparing all the time. It was not want that sent him to the United States, but the riches he hoped to get there. Judging by the sagging knapsack he carried, however, it looked as if nothing much had come of it. Yet as he walked beside the trap, he seemed cheerful enough, even gay.

The first Studenitsa cottages came into view, the trap entered the ravine and drew up at the inn. Matlakh took leave of Popsha and went on through the village in his outlandish suit to his hut at the other end.

The next day it was through the whole village that Matlakh had beaten his wife, and so badly that neigh-

bours had had to bring her to with buckets of cold water. Nobody knew the reason why, and the woman herself said nothing, only lay groaning.

After dinner Olenka slipped away to our cottage to make sure I was back safely after my long and dangerous journey. Mother was at home and Olenka stopped shyly by the door. In the dim light I could not see the expression on her face, but her eyes shone like two fire-flies.

"What is it, Olenka?" Mother asked.

"It's nothing," the girl said bashfully. "I just. . ."

"She's come to see me, Mum," I answered for her. "She gave me some herbs for good fortune on the road. Smell them!"

I took the cloth out from under my shirt and held it out to Mother, but suddenly remembering that Olenka had warned me not to show anybody the magic herbs, quickly slipped them back again.

Mother looked at me in surprise, then turned her eyes to Olenka and smiled rather sadly. What memories had come back to her? Maybe when she was a girl she, too, had gone to the Yellow Rock to gather herbs for somebody?

"Why are you standing there by the door, Olenka?" she said. "Come along in and sit you down."

Olenka timidly entered the cottage and sat down on the edge of the bench.

"What's it like there at the Matlakhs'?" Mother asked. "Have you a lot of work?"

"Oh, a lot!" Olenka answered. "I can milk the cow now, and handle the oxen too. Only I haven't learned to chop wood yet. I try so hard but I can't do it right."

"And do they treat you properly?"

"*She* treats me all right, why shouldn't she? I do all she tells me to do. But I don't know what *he's* going to be like. He came back yesterday, and right away he started beating her. . . . Soon as supper was over they

told me to go to bed. In summer I sleep under the shed, but in cold weather behind the stove, inside. I lay down and they lighted the lamp and sat down at the table and started talking. First he kept asking her what she'd done, what she'd sold and what she'd bought. And then he took something in a red cloth out from under his shirt and unwrapped it, and it was all money inside. He started counting it, and counted ever so long, and it was all new and rustled like a lot of beetles running about—it's God's truth I'm telling you, I saw it all. . . . When he'd finished he said: 'It's not a great lot, Julia.' And she says: 'And thank God for so much, it'll buy a new cottage and a bit of land.' But he says: 'There's going to be no cottage or land yet, you can just stop thinking of it. All in good time. But now I need the money for something else.' He didn't say for what. And she kept on: 'This place isn't fit for an ox, let alone human beings.' And he says to her: 'I'm going to sell the oxen and the cow too, I've a need for money.' And then they went at it ding-dong, Matlakh with one thing and she with another, till he started hitting her."

Olenka blinked, and suddenly jumped up. Her face changed from lively mischief to concern.

"Eh, I keep on sitting here, and I've still got to get water from the stream for the oxen. Good-bye!"

Her bare feet pattered to the door.

. . . A few days later Matlakh led his two oxen out of the yard, sold them to Popsha and went away somewhere. He returned after a week. Late at night, when everybody was asleep, several carts turned into his yard and the drivers—men from lowland villages—carried heavy sacks of maize into the shed where the oxen had stood. All this was done so secretly that nobody knew. I would not have known either had it not been for Olenka.

On the meadow behind our cottage, trembling with fear she told me about the mysterious carts and sacks of maize, saying all the time: "But don't you tell a soul, Ivanko! If Matlakh knows I've told anyone, he'll beat me and maybe put me out."

I swore silence.

For some days I puzzled my head about the queer secret, but soon forgot it.

Winter set in, with its "cruel time," and people began to talk of asking the innkeeper to help them; and then it came out that Petro Matlakh had got in a stock of maize in the spring; and he was not like the innkeeper, either, he would let folks have it on security. Nobody believed it at first, but the rumour was soon confirmed.

Popsha jumped about like a flea on a hot shovel and ran from house to house, mad with rage, telling everybody: "Good people! Don't you be trusting that were-wolf!"

Matlakh, however, was wide awake and he soon found someone to speak up for him. Fyodor Skripka, harassed by want and a big family, followed Popsha everywhere, saying it was God's mercy that had sent them Matlakh, and what a good thing it was to be able to borrow maize on security.

I can see him now, small, blue-eyed and nimble, in his short, tight jacket and old felt cap, standing in the middle of the street near our cottage, surrounded by bewildered peasants, and talking away, overjoyed at being the centre of attention.

"Take me, good folks, now what have I got in my hut? Mouths, nine gaping mouths. You look into them and you can't see the bottom. What have I got to give the innkeeper for maize? But I went to Matlakh, and it was American ways. 'Is there anything you need? Maize? Certainly, I'll get you a sackful, and I don't ask you for money or a cow or a sheep—just your signature on

a mortgage. That's all! And then in good time you'll return the loan and I'll give you back the paper and you can do what you like with it.' Well, now, and what do you say to that? Grand, eh?"

"Hold on a mite, and what does Matlakh make on it?" the villagers asked him.

"He makes on it, all right," said Skripka. "I got ten crowns' worth of maize and I give him back fifteen."

"So that's the way of it, neighbour," people said, and livened up. It was a very important question—not only the gain for themselves, but the gain for the man who offered his services. Their shrewd heads did not believe in disinterested generosity. With blind faith they accepted the miracles performed by the saints, prayed to the Mother of God for good crops and cures for their ailments, and sought buried treasure on Midsummer Eve, but when it came to grain, taxes or work, they expected no miracles and believed only what was perfectly clear to their practical minds.

As soon as folks knew what Matlakh himself would gain, their suspicions faded away. Nevertheless, they still hesitated. But Matlakh knew how to wait. Every midday—well-shaved, in his American tan boots and a waistcoat over a white sweater, he would strut pompously through the village from end to end, swinging a stick, exchanging polite greetings with all he met. This walk every day at the same time helped to keep him in people's minds.

"The American goes through the village like a lord through his estate," Gorulya growled, sighting him in the distance.

Nobody, not even Gorulya himself, guessed the prophetic truth of those words.

People hesitated, asked each other's advice, and at night, alone with their thoughts, sighed heavily. Matlakh, however, waited, sure of success. He was certain that if

a man was offered the choice of paying at once or sometime later, he would gladly choose the latter course; for every man nurses the hope that times will get better, and it will be much easier to pay, even with interest. Let them talk it over and give each other advice—he could wait.

Then the children began crying for food, and haggard, hollow-eyed mothers stood before the images whispering prayers for mercy, for the intercession of the Virgin.

Matlakh's time had come. First it was only one here and there who went to him, but before many days had passed, people were crowding in front of his house as though it were the church on a feast-day. Matlakh himself walked about the cottage, while a lawyer's clerk specially brought from Volovets sat at the table writing out the receipts and mortgages. In spite of the large number of people, it was very quiet. Waiting their turn, the villagers listened to the squeaking of the pen in the experienced hand of the lawyer's clerk. Those able to sign their names slowly and laboriously traced the letters on the paper, while the rest dipped a thumb into the saucer of soot paste and then pressed it to the paper in the place the lawyer's clerk showed them. This procedure finished, they went into the ox-pen where the maize was weighed out to them.

"God give you happiness," Matlakh said benevolently to each one as he left.

"God grant it," replied the villager, flattered by the attention. He had no idea that in a year or two he would no longer be master of his scrap of land, but a mere tenant. Nobody knew that the receipt bore a date for repayment, and that the time would come when they would be knocking at office doors in a vain search for justice, while Matlakh. . . . In reply to all threats, appeals to conscience and curses, Matlakh would only shrug his shoulders.

"I'm not driving you out, neighbour. Go on working the land, all you have to do is pay me rent, nothing more."

During the winter nobody gave thought to the deals that had been made. People hurried home with the sacks of maize on their backs. What if it smelt mouldy, what if there was not very much of it—the very thought that now they could eat hot maize porridge took a load off their chests.

There were many in Studenitsa, however, who had nothing to offer Matlakh. Mother and I were among them. We had no land except the patch on which our cottage stood.

5

I was twelve at the time of the great famine. Most of the other boys, usually brisk and lively, were so weak they could hardly crawl out of their cottages, and even the frost brought no colour to their pale drawn faces.

I still kept on my feet, although I was frightfully thin. To cheat my stomach I cut up a rawhide leather belt, soaked the pieces in the salt water in which Mother had boiled unpeeled potatoes, and chewed them all day long.

In the morning Mother put a few potatoes before me but did not touch any herself. When I asked why she was eating nothing, she answered: "I had some earlier."

It was the same at dinner-time and before we went to bed in the evening—potatoes in their jackets, a piece of sheep-milk cheese and Mother's brief reply: "I've had mine, son."

One morning, as she put the potatoes on the table, Mother swayed and fell to the floor. I raised her with difficulty and got her to the bed. It was only then, as I saw her lying there, that I realized how strange and unfamiliar she looked. The legs I covered with the sheep-

skin were swollen, her arms were thin, and on her gaunt, sallow face the shadow of her eye-lashes looked green. She lay breathing heavily, staring at the ceiling and saying nothing.

That day Gorulya came. He stood by Mother for some time, grim and scowling, then pulled a maize-cake from his pocket and held it out to her. She thanked him with a faint smile but did not take it. She no longer had any wish for food. . . .

A week later the Devil and Death entered our door in a cloud of frosty air.

Fyodor Skripka went in front with dancing steps, clearing the way for Gorulya.

The sight of them brought home to me for the first time the terrible, impossible thought that Mother was gone, that Famine had taken her away.

I did not cry. I stood silent in a corner, thunder-struck by the injustice I so suddenly realized and filled with rage against Famine, which I had always pictured since my early days as a giant with a dog's head and crooked legs. Why did God give him such strength? Why did people have to die of hunger? Why did God help the Pesigolovets, and not Mikola? . . . He was all-powerful and all-knowing. He could see where the lost key lay, yet He was silent. . . . Why?

I was frightened by my own thoughts, but my rage was even stronger than my fear of God. The blood rose to my head and clattered in my ears, and I imagined that I myself was Mikola of the Black Mountain. I would find the key, I would unlock the Verkhovina land for the people so that grain would rustle and whisper on it, and in our village they would speak of me with gratitude. Those were my thoughts when Ilko Gorulya began to walk round the circle swinging his scythe. People bowed their heads, but I did not move, I stood erect, my eyes wide open. . . .

"Take care!" cried Gorulya. "I may strike you!" and swung the scythe again.

It whistled through the air quite low down, but still I stood upright.

Gorulya stopped and stared at me. His eyes held only surprise, then something else came that I was at a loss to read—something stern and searching. . . . Suddenly he tore off the mask, flung it on to the earthen floor and stumbled out of the cottage, dragging the scythe behind him.

When we returned from the funeral, he walked beside me. His wife Gafia, gaunt and tall like Gorulya himself, trailed along a few paces behind.

It was very cold. The sun shone dimly through a pearly-pinkish mist, and the wind whipped up the dry snow on the ground in whirling clouds that looked from a distance like white smoke rising from snow-covered hills.

At the wayside crucifix, Gorulya's road branched off to the left, but he turned to his wife, saying: "You go home, Gafia, I'll be along a little later," and went on with me.

Where he was going I neither knew nor cared. I felt that I was now quite alone.

There was our cottage with its picket gate ajar. I crossed the yard, and Gorulya came with me. I went into the cottage, and he followed me. It was cold, dark and empty, as though nobody had lived there for many years. I stood near the door, lost, feeling as though I were in some strange place; Gorulya paced slowly about the room, then sat down on the bench and stared for a long time at the snow-flecked window. What he saw there, why he stared at it for so long, I did not understand. Finally he turned abruptly, looked at me sombrely and asked: "How will you live now, Ivanko?"

"I'll go away," I said.

"Where'll you go?"



"To look for the key."

"What key?"

"Mikola's, to unlock the land."

"So that's it," said Gorulya slowly, his searching eyes on my face. "A fine thing to do." Then suddenly his lips under the moustache twisted in the familiar mocking smile that spared nothing. "Only there isn't any key, Ivanko, and there never was one. . . . Nay, there never was one. It's all a tale folks made up, to make them feel better. Eh, the things they can make up!"

"That's a lie!" I cried angrily. "Nobody made it up about the key!"

"They didn't, eh?" said Gorulya. "And what if I tell you that I made it all up myself and told it to your mother when we were boy and girl, and then she told it to you? . . ."

He turned to the window and stared through it again, as though he had forgotten all about me. But he had not forgotten me. He rose heavily from the bench at last and stood in the middle of the room. Dusk had fallen, and I could no longer see his face.

"Ivan, listen to me," he said.

"Yes."

"The land must be unlocked," said Gorulya. "It must, but how? That's what you must think about—how. . . . You'll come and live with me. And you'll go on studying and go on thinking how to unlock the land. . . . Well—come along!"

6

"Time like flowing water smooths out all marks," they say in our mountains.

Time has yet another power. The years pass, and a confession, or a document from the archives, sheds fresh light upon the past, and you look back upon events or

even whole periods of life long ago defined and docketed in your mind, and realize that they had another meaning, a meaning formerly hidden behind seven locks.

I, too, now find that I have to divide the story of my school-years into that which was plain to me at the time, and those other things concealed behind seven locks, which came to light many years later.

... I am a pupil at the Mukachevo secondary school. I am fifteen. A gawky figure, scowling, with cropped head and large work-roughened hands—this is what I see reflected in the mirror as I stand in the principal's office. It is a large room, with four windows and an echo like in church.

Behind the desk a few paces away, on a revolving chair standing under the portrait of President Masaryk, sits the Dumpling, as the boys have nicknamed the principal—bald, red-faced, his puffy hands resting on the green baize, fixing me with vague, watery eyes that would send a chill through the pupils of the school.

"Do you regret what you have done?"

I have been waiting for that, and I answer: "No."

The principal's face goes from red to purple, his watery eyes turn so dull that they look filmy.

"Do you want to be expelled from this fine school? Do you understand the penalty that awaits you?"

I say nothing. My heart throbs painfully, and I feel it contracting and shrinking within me.

The principal's puffy hands disappear behind the green baize.

"I ask you for the last time, Belinets. Do you regret your disgraceful conduct?"

"No," I reply firmly. "No. Do what you like with me. I acted rightly, sir."

The Dumpling jumps up from his chair.

"You have the audacity to answer back!" he cries. "Leave the room! Get out!" He turns away to the window.

Lessons were over, school emptied, leaving only the charwomen wiping the blackboards with wet cloths.

Vasil Chonka, my classmate and friend, was waiting for me at the street corner. We shared the same desk, and we had no secrets from each other. Chonka was considered one of the best pupils in the whole school. He had a restless imagination and one great passion—the sea. Heaven alone knows where this son of a cabinet-maker in Chust—a town tucked away among the mountains—had acquired this love for the sea, but there it was! He had never seen the sea in his life, but he could talk about it for hours on end.

As soon as I appeared, Chonka ran to meet me.

“Well?”

“Looks bad.”

“Expulsion?”

I said nothing.

It was the end of September, but a day so fine and warm that autumn seemed very far away.

Chonka and I walked along shady Vokzalnaya Street towards the railway line. I had my quarters there on the very edge of Mukachevo—a pallet in a dark pantry with a perpetual smell of sour wine. I paid no rent for this hole, but each day helped the landlady's son with his home-work. He was two years older than I, stupid, lazy and dishonest, and was in the fourth grade at the local school. My landlady, Pani¹ Elena, was a thin, greedy, niggardly widow, who tried hard to look younger than her years. She kept a wine-cellar, and in addition to this received visitors, or, as she called them, clients. I would have been glad to get away from the place, but where could I go? Where else could I find a corner where I could sleep for nothing? And for one who often lacked even a few hellers for a dinner, that meant a lot.

¹ Pani means Mrs.; Pan—Mr.—*Tr.*

Vokzalnaya Street stretched far, Chonka strolled along beside me, thoughtful and concerned.

"What did the Dumpling say to you, anyway?"

"He asked if I was sorry for what I did."

"And you said 'no'?"

"Certainly."

"And if you'd said 'yes' it would all have blown over. It..."

"Drop it!" I cut him short.

He was silent, but not for long.

"What will you do now?"

"I haven't any idea."

Chonka kicked some yellow leaves lying on the path, then stopped and said in a whisper: "You know what, Ivanko—let's run away!..."

"Where to?"

"To Russia."

"To Russia?"

For a moment the idea fired me too.

"It's a long way," I sighed. "A very long way."

"Yes, it's a long way," Chonka answered. "But you know, Ivanko, there are thirteen seas and two oceans there..."

He left me by the station. I felt that Chonka wanted to say something to make me feel better, to find some way out, but no words came to him and he could think of nothing.

We parted silently. Chonka turned back to the town—he lived close to the school. I dragged my way home. It was only now that I felt the reaction from the strain of the past two days. My whole body was weary and ached. I wanted to be alone, to lie down on my pallet and think of nothing. I was even vaguely glad that my pantry was dark.

The landlady, thin as a lath, red spots of rouge on her cheeks, met me at the gate. She blocked my way, so

I stopped and waited for her to step aside. She made no movement, however, and there was fear in her insolent green eyes.

"You'll have to move out of here," she hissed. "For two years I thought you were a respectable person, and you—I'm told you wanted to kill the son of Pan Kovač of Batevo! Maybe you're a Red into the bargain?... I can't risk the reputation of my house and my son. It's terrible to think of who has been living in my house and teaching Petrik!"

It would have been both useless and obnoxious to try to justify myself before this woman.

"Go to hell with your Petrik and your reputation!"

Pani Elena gasped, took a step back and slammed the gate; a few minutes later my knapsack with all my books and other possessions stuffed into it flew out over the fence.

Beyond the railway line lay an old, abandoned orchard. A tumble-down watchman's hut stood in the middle, concealed by the undergrowth. This was a favourite refuge for Chonka and me. On fine days in spring and autumn we used to come here to do our lessons, or to dream, lying on a pile of grass we had mown. This quiet, secluded, slightly mysterious spot was a place of concealment; it reminded me somehow of my own Studenitsa.

There I went now with my knapsack, flung myself down on the grass and lay motionless, eyes closed. And memories flashed across my mind.

Two years before, Gorulya had brought me to Mukachevo in the early autumn. We went on foot to save a few crowns; the knapsacks over our shoulders contained food to last us a few days, shoes which Gorulya had bought me, some rough linen shirts and a jacket that Gafia had made out of Gorulya's gamekeeper's uniform.

We went barefoot to save our shoes. It was only when we reached the town that Gorulya told me to put them on, and also the jacket with the green cloth lapels.

After my mother's death, I had gone to live with Gorulya.

Gafia received me with a cautious restraint; she feared to betray her former jealousy and hurt, but she was honest and sincere, and made no display of affection.

I was conscious of this, and behaved with reserve.

Gorulya's position was the most awkward. He kept a close eye on both of us, ready at any moment to deal with the slightest sign of discord.

Time, however, or unspent maternal feeling gradually softened Gafia. I did not even notice how the change came, but she began to be concerned for my wants, reminded Gorulya that "the lad needs new shoes," and in talk with the neighbours referred to me as "our Ivanko."

Gradually I became fond of her, too, and this delighted Gorulya. Now not a day passed without his turning the conversation to my future studies. What Mother had striven for in her last years filled his thoughts and became part of his very life.

There was no need to urge me to pore over books—I myself was drawn to them, and tracked them down, not only in Studenitsa, but in the neighbouring villages as well. Every day saw my desire to study grow until it possessed my whole mind.

How much water I carried for Popsha and other inn-keepers in Bystroye and Potoki! How many floors I scrubbed, how many sheds I cleaned for them, to acquire a few sheets of ruled paper and some book which had been gathering dust on a shelf!

Looking for books I found a teacher to take the place of Gorulya, whose knowledge was already insufficient for my needs.

This teacher was the wife of the new Studenitsa priest, who had lately come to our parts. The priest was an elderly man; his wife was young, pretty and well educated—but given to drink. She had two children, twins, three years old, and she wanted a nursemaid for them. Folk said in the village that these were not the priest's children, and that it was not from choice that she had married an old man. That was why she drank.

One day in the middle of winter I plucked up courage to ask the priest's wife for a book. On hearing that I wanted to study, she thought for a few minutes, then said suddenly: "Come and look after my two boys, and I will teach you myself."

"I can't do that," I said. "Everybody in the village would laugh at me."

The temptation, however, was great. I returned home and told Gorulya about the offer.

"Well, Ivanko," he sighed. "I don't see as we've got much choice!... You won't have to be a nursemaid all your life, but study you must. I've heard tell that the priest's wife used to be a school-teacher in the town."

That was how I became the nursemaid and pupil of the priest's wife.

She made me work hard, but she taught me well. I seized hungrily upon all she told me, and often went far ahead in the text-books, studying alone.

To Gorulya she praised my abilities highly, much to his pride and satisfaction.

My fears concerning the village boys were justified. They would run after me shouting:

"Nursemaid! Nursemaid! Where's your kerchief?"

At first I set about them with my fists, but after a while I learned to take no notice.

In this way a year passed, and the priest's wife said that I had learned in that one year more than it would take others to learn in three.

Then the blow fell.

My teacher's drinking grew worse. Her beautiful face became puffy and red, her eyes dull. She cared for nothing but the spirits which the innkeeper's wife secretly supplied.

"Don't drink, Ma'am," I pleaded. "Please don't."

"You don't understand anything yet, Ivanko," she answered. "When you do, you'll drink too."

In the end the priest had to take his wife to hospital.

Now there was no longer any place in the village where I could study, nor was there anybody to teach me. People said that the village school would be opened again in Bystroye the following autumn, but pupils there would start with the alphabet. That was when Gorulya made up his mind to send me to the secondary school at Mukachevo.

It was a time following a period of fierce struggle. The bourgeois Czechoslovak Republic, child of the Versailles Treaty—to which our land now belonged—was just getting on to its feet. The word "democracy" was used on any and every occasion. Portraits of President Masaryk holding a green branch—symbol of goodness, justice and peace—were sent out free to all the villages, even those in the most out-of-the-way spots.

It was a visiting official who explained to the Studenitsa folk, assembled at the Village Council, what the branch signified.

"Watch out the branch doesn't shed its leaves any too soon," I heard Gorulya say to Grandad Gritsan as he left the Council.

"Eh," the old man laughed bitterly, "I saw, Ilko, such ones with leaves flog a man till the blood came."

For Gorulya, Gafia and myself, however, life was even harder than before. Gorulya had no steady work.

He would make the rounds of neighbouring villages and take on any job he could get.

Gorulya's decision to send me to town to school soon became a much debated topic in the village. Some laughed, others shook their heads.

Fyodor Skripka walked into the cottage.

"What's all this, neighbour?" he asked. "Have you lost your wits, or are you just having a joke on us?"

"My wits are sound, and I'm not joking."

"Oho! Have you come into a fortune, or found a buried treasure?"

"I've found no treasure and there's no fortune either," Gorulya answered, and went on sharpening his saw.

"Well, then . . . what . . ." Skripka was at a loss.

"Plain enough. The lad's got to study. I'll take him to Mukachevo, and if the Holy Virgin wills it, he'll study there."

Skripka stood lost in thought.

"It's not right, Ilko, to make a gentleman out of Maria's boy," he said. "He'll learn a lot of things, and he'll learn to be shamed o' you too. He won't want to look at you. What d'you reckon on?"

"I'm reckoning on myself and on the lad."

"But what'll he live on?" asked Skripka. "If you'd got a bit of something, now, but you're no better off than I am. . . . Maybe you're reckoning on somebody there?"

"Just on myself and the lad," said Gorulya calmly.

But for all that calmness I well knew the care weighing on him.

Sometimes Gorulya would come home late and sit whispering with Gafia; if he awakened in good spirits the next morning, I knew that he had found a job somewhere. But most of his wanderings through the villages led to nothing.

"That's the way it goes, Ivanko," said Gorulya. "Here's me with hands that could feed ten, and a head

no worse than other folks', and wanting work till I'm sick at heart, and what's the good?"

I could see how hard Gorulya was taking it, and one day I made up my mind; I told him that I would drop the idea of studying and look for some sort of work, he need not worry about sending me to school.

Gorulya gave me a searching look.

"But what about the land?" he asked. "You wanted to unlock it..." Then he added gaily: "And don't you think it's all for your sake I'm running about, lad, not I! I'm doing it to please myself, life's cheerier that way."

Perhaps it really was so.

7

The town drew us into its dusty streets, filled with rumbling carts, human voices and all its bustle. To me, a country lad who had never been beyond Volovets, Mukachevo seemed the biggest town in the world. "People must have come from everywhere to gather in its streets," I thought.

I had been brought up to exchange a greeting with everybody I met, even with strangers—such was the custom in the villages, and I tried to keep to it here. But to my surprise nobody replied. All I saw was new and strange, but neither the newness nor strangeness could make me forget the purpose which had brought us there. "In a few days," I kept thinking, "Gorulya will go back to Studenitsa, and I'll stop here at school. But what if they don't take me? They may not..." I cared nothing about where or how I was to live. I was ready to put up with anything if only I could study.

Gorulya seemed to guess my thoughts.

"Now don't you worry, lad, it'll be all right. We'll manage somehow. And we'll find a place for you to live,

too. Maybe Fyodor Lukanich will take you to live with him, he's an easy, friendly sort of man for all his learning. Eh, we smelt enough powder together at Chop by the Tisza and up in the mountains when we both fought for Soviet Hungary. I've got his address, we'll get to his house and then you'll see how old friends meet!"

I had already heard much about Fyodor Lukanich from Gorulya. At one time he had been a teacher at the Uzhgorod seminary, in no great favour with his superiors because of his free-thinking. During the war he was discharged from the seminary and sent to the front. He returned home to Mukachevo in 1919, when the Russine Red Guard was being mustered to defend the young Soviet Hungary. Lukanich joined one of these detachments, and there he met Gorulya.

He quickly earned a reputation as a fine orator but above all as a man of learning. Men like that were badly needed. There was even talk of transferring him to the Commissariat of Education, but punitive forces began advancing through the Carpathians and fierce battles started.

In the fighting at the Latoritsa River, Gorulya saved Lukanich's life, carrying him wounded and unconscious along steep mountain paths through the enemy lines. This brought the two men closer together, and when they parted in the mountains near Studenitsa after the defeat of the Russine Red Guard, Lukanich said: "If we both live to meet again, remember I'll always owe you a debt, Ilko, to the end of my life. If you ever need help, count on me."

For a long time Gorulya heard nothing of Lukanich, but finally learned that he was alive and teaching at the Mukachevo secondary school. Gorulya had his address written on a scrap of paper, and now here we were, walking through the town to seek him.

The house where we stopped, after Gorulya had consulted his bit of paper again, had been built very long ago but renovated. Only three small windows looked out on the quiet, grass-grown street, but the house stretched far back into the garden, and several doors opened on to a wooden veranda, painted a dark colour, with vines twining up it.

It was evening and dusk was falling. A heavy, near-sighted woman let us into the garden and called: "Pan Lukanich!"

The master of the house had already appeared, however—an ungainly man of about forty, inclined to stoutness, with retreating hair that made his forehead seem high.

"Pan Lukanich. . . ."

"Gorulya! Ilko!"

I had a feeling that Lukanich was embarrassed, but he quickly caught hold of Gorulya and embraced him.

"It's real good to meet again," said Gorulya.

"Yes, I should say it is," Lukanich replied, wiping his face and neck with his handkerchief, and invited us into the house.

He led us from the veranda into the kitchen which was large and spacious enough to have held two cottages like ours. Lukanich lit a lamp and began moving chairs about, made Gorulya sit down by the table, then at last turned his attention to me.

"Whose lad is this?"

Gorulya hesitated.

"Well . . . mine."

"Wait a moment, wait a moment," Lukanich frowned, trying to remember. "I don't seem to recall that you had a boy."

"I hadn't in those days, true enough," said Gorulya, throwing me an encouraging glance. "I hadn't then, but now I've got Ivanko Belinets. I've brought him here to study to get out of our blind ignorance."

"Oh," said Lukanich uncertainly, then turned to me abruptly and began asking me where I wanted to study, where I had studied before and what I knew.

At first I was diffident and tongue-tied, but Lukanich's benevolent interest soon drew me out and I began talking more freely.

The woman entered—she was Lukanich's servant—and placed a glass jug of wine and plates with thin slices of cold meat on the table.

Gorulya and Lukanich drank to their meeting and even I had a tiny glass of wine. Then they began recalling old days; actually, it was Gorulya who did most of the talking, mentioning names strange to me but evidently dear to him, while Lukanich sat nodding his head and saying: "Yes . . . yes, I remember."

They drank little, and it seemed almost as though they were waiting for something. At last Gorulya asked: "And how do you stand now?"

"Oh, I . . . I had to write to the Minister in Prague, and then I was appointed to teach history to the upper forms in the secondary school."

"That's not what I mean," Gorulya said regretfully and sighed. "See how everything's turned out! Folks were going home, and they were swung around and pushed into a stranger's yard."

"But even strange yards are not all alike," Lukanich said. "In examining life, and particularly the life of nations, you must be sensible first of all. Yes, the yard is a stranger's, but nevertheless it is the yard of a state which is creating a democracy such as Europe has never known! Oh, I know autonomy has not yet been given to our region; but it's too early for that. Our people are very backward, Gorulya. That's not their fault, of course. They were ground down by the oppression of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy for many, many centuries. We must

first reach cultural and political maturity, then we can think of autonomy!"

"Look at that, now!" said Gorulya with pretended naiveté. "But you know, I've heard tell all that's just talk, and they don't give us autonomy because they're afraid of the Reds—eh? That they're afraid if the people elect a regional diet, it'll have a majority of Reds."

Lukanich scowled.

"That's what I've heard said," Gorulya added, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't know if it's right."

Gorulya knew well enough that it was and I came to know it too, but much later. Czechoslovakia's rulers of that time were indeed afraid to grant autonomy to a region which among themselves they called the Red Vendée. Officials swarmed over our mountains. Die-hard reactionaries whom the government thought it injudicious to use in the central districts were sent out to us. And over it all hovered benignantly the portrait of the democratic President with his green branch.

I listened to Lukanich and Gorulya with the feeling that a duel was being fought, although I had only the vaguest idea of what it was all about.

"That's not the way to look at it, Gorulya," said Lukanich, frowning in disapproval. "We have the right to elect our representatives to parliament. All parties are legal, even the Communist. Did we have that democracy before, under Austria-Hungary, when we weren't even regarded as human beings? Tell me, did we have that?"

"No, there was none o' that," Gorulya agreed.

"Well, you see, then!" Lukanich cried in triumph. "You must always judge the present by what has been left behind in the past."

"He-he-hel" Gorulya sniggered as though apologetically and shook his head. "And there's people who won't be looking back at the bad times, but forward to better

ones. And where else will a man look, I ask you, if he had no land then and he's got none now, if he was hungry then and he still is now, if he had the gentry over him and he's got 'em yet, even if they are dressed different? Nay, again, Pan Lukanich, a nightingale won't sing if you clap it in a cage, no matter if that cage is made of pure gold."

"You want everything all at once," said Lukanich with a shrug.

Gorulya nodded. "Aye, all at once. Land and work and freedom and our own government. . . ."

He drew the wine-glass towards him, raised it and said: "Let's drink to Mikhailo Kurtinets, Pan Lukanich. I know you don't drink to the dead, but he's still alive for me."

They drank.

"And to think that all those men died for nothing!" said Lukanich.

Gorulya's brows drew together.

"For nothing?" he repeated, and his look was cold and hostile.

"All that struggle and fighting gave us nothing but thousands of deaths that need never have been," Lukanich continued. "People who might have been alive today, might have been with their families, with. . . ."

"Nay, nay, you're wrong!" Gorulya interrupted. "On the land soaked with that blood the happiness of the common folks will grow. But you. . . ."

He broke off and waited a moment to master his feelings, then turned to me.

"Time for us to be moving, Ivanko. It's late."

Lukanich urged us to stay the night, and promised to see about somewhere for me to live, but Gorulya was not to be persuaded.

"Thank you, thank you," he said. "But we found a place to sleep before we came here, they'll be expecting us. . . ."

I could not understand why Gorulya had said this, knowing as I did that we had not even looked for any place to sleep—on the contrary, we had expected to stop some days with Lukanich. I was even sorry for our host, seeing that he was hurt by our refusal.

It was only after we had gone some distance that I asked Gorulya who was walking glumly ahead: "Why didn't we stay, *Vuiku*, why did you have to affront him like that?"

"That's my affair!" Gorulya snapped angrily. "He was glad enough to see the back of us, don't you worry!"

We spent the night in the waiting-room at Mukachevo station.

A photo on the third page of a newspaper. On it are five boys, standing stiffly at the entrance to the secondary school, their faces blank and in some strange way alike as though they were quintuplets. I was one of them, the second from the left. We had not yet received any text-books, and gilt-edged volumes, heavy as paving-stones, had been thrust into our hands—volumes of a German encyclopaedia. I saw them again later, in the glass-fronted bookcase in the principal's office.

"Congratulations to these boys from Verkhovinal" the caption ran. "They have passed their entrance examinations and have been admitted to secondary school. The paternal care of the republic and its lofty democratic principles have opened the road to education for children in all strata of the population of Sub-Carpathian Rus. These five boys (our names and villages followed) are but the first. We wish them all success in the sphere of learning."

Gorulya looked at the photo, carefully read the caption, then said with a smile as he folded the newspaper: "They're afeared of us, Ivanko."

I was hurt by Gorulya's contempt for the photo: in my heart of hearts I felt proud of it. He jeered, too, at the principal's speech of congratulation delivered after we passed the examinations. "Why's he like that?" I thought. "Why does he always look for something bad behind everything, why can't he believe what people say?" I found it all very confusing, and a shadow fell on my long-awaited happiness; for the first time in my life I began to wonder if Gorulya was not unfair at times.

What could I know about the report concealed behind seven locks in the Ministry of Education, a report which has now been made public?

I have read them through again, those yellowing sheets from the archives sent to me recently by friends in Prague.

The government official who wrote these sheets had discarded the democratic smirk, so trying but—alas!—so necessary to him, and let his face fall into its natural lines. The report ran blunt and clear:

"The opening of secondary schools in Sub-Carpathian Rus with teaching in the native language has produced a very desirable moral effect in the region. There need be no apprehensions that the schools will be inundated by pupils from the lower classes of the population. The material standard of these classes is so low that even with free tuition they are not in a position to provide their children with education. With regard to those who do enroll, their number will be small and will undoubtedly diminish. With regard to those who succeed in completing their secondary education, every effort must be exerted to make them a reliable support for us among the Russines."

Gorulya stayed with me in Mukachevo until the examinations were over. A Czech railwayman called Ladislav Streča took us in for those first few days; it

was he who later recommended me as tutor for the landlady's son.

Gorulya set off for home to Studenitsa late on Sunday afternoon. Before leaving, he took out the savings he had put by for me, wrapped in a piece of rag. It was for this that he had tramped the villages seeking work, it was about this that he had whispered with Gafia in the evenings.

"It's not much, Ivanko," said Gorulya. "But it'll help you weather the first days. Mind it does, for you're on your own now." He passed his hand gently over my shaven head.

It was hard to say good-bye. I felt this very keenly at the last moment. Gorulya gave me his final instructions, now frowning, now smiling, while I clenched my fists and bit my lower lip, determined not to let the tears come.

"Hey, none of that!" said Gorulya sternly. "None of that foolishness, d'you hear me?... You're a fine Mikola of the Black Mountain!..."

8

I was now a pupil at the Mukachevo secondary school.

The school authorities were strict and kept a sharp eye on us; the words we heard most frequently were: "democratic principles." We heard them from the geography professor Andrei Nikolayevich Spiridonov, an émigré who had fled from Russia in 1919; we heard them incessantly from mathematics professor Zinchenko, a stout man afflicted with shortness of breath, who was said to have been vice-minister in the Petlyura government. The school principal talked endlessly about the great democratic principles of the republic. We prayed for them in the Scripture hours.

Life was very hard; I was always in need, even though Gorulya did assist me as much as he could. He was ready to take on any job to get a few crowns to send me.

Work was not so easy to find, however, even for a man like Gorulya, skilled in so many trades. And determined to help me continue my studies, he began hunting in the Count's forests that gripped Studenitsa in a tight ring.

A villager with a shot-gun in Count Schönborn's hunting preserves, where even the children did not dare to go berrying! The risk was terrible, and God help him if he be caught!

Schönborn's foresters and keepers were quick to suspect Gorulya of poaching, they watched him and even combed the forest several times, but Gorulya slipped skilfully away with his bag into thickets where even the Count's menials dared not follow him.

Gorulya was a dead shot; he killed bears, mountain goats and deer. The skins were bought from him by tourists who flocked to the forest-clad Carpathians.

During the winter Gorulya sometimes came to Mukachevo. It was a long and difficult journey, but he never admitted that he had come to visit me, invariably insisting that he had business there.

Vague rumours of Gorulya's risky hunting came to my ears, and I taxed him with it; he feigned surprise, growled angrily and assured me that it was nothing but talk spread by people who bore him ill will. One day, however, when I was particularly insistent, Gorulya gave way and admitted it.

"Well—maybe I do fire a shot or two sometimes. . . ."

"And get called a poacher!" I cried bitterly.

Gorulya started, then sighed and gave me a look of such reproach that I could not endure it and hung my head. To this very day that look burns me, and I cannot think without shame of the words I flung at Gorulya.

"A poacher?" Gorulya repeated. "And who calls me that? The gentry and their lickspittles! Have I ever killed a beast in the closed season, tell me that! The gentry hunt to amuse themselves, but it's not amusement for me, Ivanko. . . . And those woods don't belong to the Count. The gentry stole the woods from me!"

In the meantime trouble stalked Gorulya in Studenitsa, although not from the quarter whence it could be feared.

The Ovsaks who had killed Mikhailo Kurtinets and his comrades in the shed had themselves met their death when their farm burned down—with one exception, the elder. He had tripped his wife as she tried to get out of the window of the burning house, and jumped himself. The new authorities of the district, knowing how the Ovsaks were hated, looked askance at the former elder, despite his frantic efforts to curry favour with them. He bore himself meekly and humbly in the village and fawned upon everybody—even Gorulya, whom he suspected of having had a hand in the fire. Behind his oily smiles, however, he hated Gorulya and only awaited an opportunity to settle accounts with him.

Time passed, and finally Ovsak won his way into the good graces of the authorities. And he managed to get the district police to start an investigation into the cause of the fire. There was no clue leading to Gorulya, but the hunt was persistent—particularly as the police looked on him with little favour and would have been delighted to find something against him.

The investigation was conducted cautiously, in secret. Gorulya was not even summoned for questioning, lest he be put on his guard. He, however, got wind of what Ovsak and the officials were doing and reasoned that sooner or later false witnesses would be produced, bringing certain disaster. He therefore set off for Slovakia, telling nobody but Gafia where he was going.

"Ivanko," he wrote me from there, "ill fortune's hit me and I have had to leave Studenitsa for strange parts: when I'll see you again I cannot say.

"The mountains here are green like ours, and the folk are as poor as ours, too. Tear up this letter, and if anyone asks you about me, say you don't know anything. There is no call to worry about me, I will bide my time some way. I hired out, in summer I will float rafts. You go on studying, lad, mind you don't think of stopping. I shan't leave you in the lurch, I will help you all I can.

"As soon as I get a bit of money together, I will send it to Ladislav Streča for you, you remember, the Czech who works on the railway, we stayed with him when we first came to Mukachevo. You go and see him, he is one of our sort. I have written to him. Keep some of the money for yourself and send the rest to Studenitsa, to my old woman. Don't expect to hear often from me, there's no saying what trouble letters could bring. God keep you."

Streča's wife brought me the letter one morning. I read and reread the pencilled sheet several times and went gloomily to school. I had no mind for study that day. I heard nothing of the teachers' explanations and could hardly wait for lessons to end. Gorulya was in my mind all the time.

* * *

From dawn till darkness, in sunshine and rain, I sat by the roadside breaking stones, stripped to the waist, my legs wrapped in rags to protect them from any chance blow of the hammer, my face, hands and body covered with scratches from the flying chips.

That was how I spent the summer. The work was far too hard for my years, and one-third of my wages was kept back by the road foreman for himself.

"That's not fair," I protested once. He glanced at me indifferently.

"Just as you please, lad. If you don't like the job, you don't have to stop. Go and get another if you want. There's plenty here to take your place."

I could see that for myself. Gaunt, haggard men would stand for hours by the roadside, as though waiting and hoping for one of the stone-breakers to collapse—and leave a vacant place. Another job—where could I find one? Here at least I did not have to pay for shelter. I slept in a shed by the roadside.

I set my teeth and worked, my strength stiffened by the thought of earning a little money to help me through the winter.

In the autumn when school started again, after my lessons I went to Krasnaya Gora outside the town, where the vineyards lay. Hands were hired there at harvest time—porters, pickers and men to work the wine-presses. Nearly all the poorer schoolboys went.

We sang as we worked—song after song. This was our employer's rule—to prevent us from eating the grapes.

Letters from Gorulya were few and far between, and the occasional crowns he managed to enclose I sent on to Gafia. She was no longer living at home, but working for hire as my mother used to do.

The only thing which made my poverty endurable, the thing for which I could patiently endure the worst, was my schooling.

I searched greedily for knowledge; I was in a hurry—actually in a hurry to learn all I could. I always had the feeling that school was a piece of good fortune that had come my way by chance and might end at any moment; I must get as much as possible from it while I could. The school authorities praised me and had to hold me up as an example; even Lukanich, meeting me in the corridor, used to say: "I'm very glad to hear how well you're doing. Very glad."

... Now all this was to end. School, lessons, hopes—everything which had cost Gorulya and myself so much. I clenched my fists until the nails cut into my palms. Mother of God, have you no mercy? No, I would not beg the principal to let me stay. Why should I say I was wrong when I was right?...

... It had all happened three days ago. Before setting off for the vineyard after school, I had gone for a plate of soup to the canteen where out-of-town pupils usually had dinner. The canteen was full, and I found a place where three of the senior boys were already having coffee. Among them was our football star Petro Kovač, from the seventh form. He was the son of a wealthy farmer, the leading light in the Agrarian party of Batevo region. Petro was a tall, red cheeked lout with pale, colourless eyes that expressed nothing but stupidity and conceit. He thought he was irresistible and was always surrounded by a crowd of admirers of his football exploits as well as toadies attracted by his full purse. He was vain and boastful; he was disliked, but he was feared.

"Listen, Belinets," Kovač turned towards me superciliously. "Just move over to another table, will you? There's a vacant place over there."

"Why?" I asked quietly. "Is this place taken?"

"No, it's not taken," said Kovač. "But you stink of manure."

"Of what?" the others asked.

"Manure," Kovač repeated and sniffed noisily. "Can't you smell the Verkhovina cowshed?"

He burst out laughing.

"Let him alone," one of the boys urged, seeing that I had gone pale with anger. "There's no smell at all—really there isn't."

"Oh, don't you try and tell me!" said Kovač, wrinkling his nose. "I know the Verkhovinians, we hire them every summer. The stink's born in them!"

These repeated insults were too much. I lost my temper, stood up and struck Kovač with all my might. The blow took him in the face, and he fell noisily, overturning chairs and tables.

The next day the whole school learned of the incident in the canteen, and all the fine show of good fellowship so carefully nurtured by the principal and form-masters vanished, to their utter horror. Within half an hour the school was split up into two camps, one taking my side, and the other—boys from wealthy families—supporting Kovač.

Scuffles broke out in the corridors.

"Beggars! Get out of the school!"

"Hang the gentry from the lamp-posts!"

The form-masters had difficulty in getting us into the class-rooms.

Kovač did not appear. Chonka found out that he was in bed with a swollen face. His father came from Batevo and spent a long time closeted with the principal. . . .

There my memories ended. . . .

I was to be expelled. Alone in the watchman's hut, I saw more clearly with every minute that elapsed that this would be the inevitable outcome. Who would take my side? What was I to the principal, the form-masters, the teachers—compared with Kovač? Suppose I went and apologized? But I had acted as anybody should in my place! I had nothing to apologize for.

I spent the night in the watchman's hut and in the morning decided not to go to school. Why should I? It made no difference now.

Hunger nagged me, but worn out by the sleepless night I began to doze. It was late when the sound of footsteps awakened me. I opened my eyes and saw Chonka standing in the doorway.

"So there you are!" he cried. "Get up quick and come to the school, the principal's asking for you. He sent me to look for you. Come on, get up!"

"I shan't go," I said.

"But he's sent for you!" Chonka looked at me with imploring eyes. "He sent me to look for you."

"Let him. There's nothing for me there now."

Chonka hung his head. In his heart of hearts he probably felt the same; nevertheless after a moment he said again: "But maybe it's worth while coming all the same, Ivanko?"

I was just about to snap out "No!" but suddenly changed my mind. "All right, I'll go. I'm in the right, not they. Let them see I'm not afraid of them!"

9

All the teachers and form-masters were assembled in the principal's office, sitting sedately on high-backed chairs along the walls, like a jury. A group of boys were crowded in the doorway behind me—two representatives summoned from each form. Kovač stood in the middle of the office near me. His face was swollen, a white plaster adorned his left cheek, and every now and then I caught his eyes resting on me in malicious triumph.

"Belinets," began the principal, "why were you absent from school today?"

I made no reply.

"Are you ill?"

"No, I'm quite well."

"H'm," said the principal, pressing his lips together.

He rose and let his eyes travel slowly round all present. "Well, gentlemen, we will turn to the business that has brought you here. I hope that each one of us has had ample time to form an unbiased opinion. Let us ex-

press it. Let all know that we are impartial educators and impartial judges. Gentlemen, I await your views."

The first to speak was Zinchenko, the mathematics teacher.

"I am too much disturbed, sir, over this unfortunate occurrence to speak at any great length. The Romans were brief in expressing their feelings and thoughts. I shall follow their example. I say: expulsion!"

With a gesture befitting the occasion the mathematics teacher sank heavily into his chair, looking sombrely in my direction.

The next to rise was the literature teacher, Gonyak, a thin, hook-nosed man. He spoke gently and sadly and at length, summing up with the words: "We cannot deny Belinets' abilities or diligence, but his conduct, his . . . disrespect for one who is the pride and ornament of our glorious school—I speak of the pupil Kovač—cannot but merit our condemnation. I feel compelled, with deep regret, to express the same opinion as my colleague Zinchenko."

The principal's swivel-chair creaked.

"I wish for the floor!"

It was Lukanich's voice. He stood by the window, stroking his fingers as though they were numb, in no haste to begin. People were puzzled by his long pause, and began to cough and whisper; then silence fell, a silence so deep and tense that one felt it could be broken even by a movement of the eyes. This was the moment which Lukanich had been waiting for, and in unhurried, even tones he proceeded:

"I cannot but admire the sincere feelings of my honourable colleagues, the more so that these feelings are evoked by an incident incompatible with our principles. But it is just because of these principles that I cannot agree and shall never agree with the conclusions which my colleagues have drawn."

I could hardly believe my ears. . . . There was a stir in the office and the teachers began whispering. Zinchenko gasped and was on the point of interrupting, but the Dumpling stopped him with a gesture and turned to Lukanich.

"Please continue, Pan Lukanich. We are all attention, please continue."

Lukanich passed his handkerchief over his bald head.

"No, I cannot agree. We speak about consequences, but we must also consider causes!"

The principal nodded approvingly; this was sufficient for the look of bewilderment on the teachers' faces to give way to one of acquiescence.

"Kovač insulted his schoolfellow," Lukanich continued. "I cannot approve of the manner in which Belinets answered the insult, but at the same time we must condemn the conduct of Kovač. Why do you wish to expel Belinets? Because this youth who was brought up in a poor family in Verkhovina and has only recently been granted access to learning—because he refused to swallow an insult? I say again—fist-fighting is an unworthy means of retaliation and he who uses it deserves censure, but none of us has the right to pass judgement on one who resents a personal insult."

Was it possible? The Dumpling was nodding approval again.

Utter confusion filled my heart and mind. I was afraid to believe it, afraid to think, afraid to listen when the speakers who followed Lukanich supported him, when the Dumpling, smoothing the green baize of the table with pudgy hands, said that there could of course be no question of my expulsion from the school, that he concurred entirely with Lukanich's profound and objective statement, and that Kovač and I would receive a reprimand.

"In this school, as in this republic, there can be no sons and stepsons. It is the aim of democracy that from

the doors of this school there should go forth faithful servants of the republic, a generation united, abhorring dissension and political extremes."

"There, you see, you idiot!" cried Vasil Chonka to me on the stairs. "And you didn't want to come. Thank Heaven it's all blown over. Who'd ever have expected it?... But Lukanich! There's a man for you!"

"Why, did you hear what he said?"

"Of course I did! We were all outside the door. Well, that's that! But you don't seem any too pleased about it, I must say!"

"Of course I'm pleased, what do you think, Vasil!" I said quickly. "Of course I'm pleased. . . . But what I can't understand is, why they've turned right round like that? Yesterday the Dumpling drove me out of the office, and Kovač's father—well, you know yourself. . . . And now, today it's all so different. I can't make head or tail of it!"

I could see well enough why all the professors who spoke after Lukanich had echoed his views. Instinctively they trimmed their sails to the wind, and as soon as they saw that the Dumpling was at one with Lukanich, they supported the latter without further thought. But why—why had the Dumpling himself been against my expulsion?

"Rubbish!" Chonka jerked up his head. "It was only justice!"

"Justice?" It seemed to be the only feasible explanation. But how far it was from the truth!

How could I know that the incident with Kovač, and the disturbance it caused among the pupils of the school, had attracted the notice of the as yet little known Father Novak, who held a small post at the episcopate.

Almost a quarter of a century later Novak, arraigned before a Soviet court, in a cracked, senile voice, outlined the dark deeds of his long life. He told how, on instructions from the Roman Catholic Church, he had influenced

through his agents many sides of the life of our country, including life in our educational institutions, though these officially were separated from the church.

My school story was cited as an example.

Novak spoke at length and I was amazed at his remembering all the details; he gave his listeners a very clear and vivid picture of what had happened.

The day after the incident at the school had become common knowledge, Father Novak asked Professor Lukanich to pay him a call. Apart from everything else, the two were bound by years spent together in teaching at the Uzhgorod seminary.

"Pan Lukanich, what does the school board plan to do in regard to Belinets, that pupil of yours?" asked Novak.

"Expel him, Father," replied Lukanich.

"And what is your opinion?"

"I, too, am of the opinion that he must be expelled . . . the black sheep must leave the flock."

"So, so," the priest drawled. "And what will happen to the boy after he is expelled?"

Lukanich shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know, Father, is that any concern of ours?"

"It is," Novak said resolutely. "These are troublous times and there are getting to be too many black sheep. It has become far easier to drive people out of the flock than to draw them into it."

"I do not quite understand what you mean," Lukanich said.

"The truth, plain and simple, is that we no longer should surrender human souls to the sworn enemy of the Holy Roman Catholic Church as freely as we have done hitherto," replied the priest and added: "If we go on the way we have, we'll lose the whole flock. . . . You, Pan Lukanich, must oppose the expulsion of this boy."

"But I may prove the only one to do so."

"You need have no fear on that score, my son."

How could I know that the very next day a department chief of the Mukachevo police commissariat had rung up the school principal, requesting him to support anyone who would oppose my expulsion, so that the case might be held up as an example of the triumph of humane, democratic principles.

I knew nothing of all these things, and my heart lightened when Chonka spoke of justice. I began to have a kindly feeling for the Dumpling, and saw Lukanich as the very epitome of justice.

The staircase, the passages and the entrance-hall were crowded with boys who had remained after lessons. They knew everything, they were wildly excited, and wherever I went I heard Lukanich's name.

Lukanich himself emerged from the principal's room and made his way towards me, followed by a downcast Kovač.

"See to it that such a thing never happens again," said Lukanich gently and propelled me towards Kovač. "Now shake hands."

Hateful though it was, I forced myself to shake hands for Lukanich's sake.

A crowd of boys came running up and surrounded the teacher.

"You know what, Vasil," I whispered. "Let's see him home."

"Huh!" Vasil laughed. "You're behind the times! We thought of that long ago!"

A large group of boys accompanied the teacher home. We filled up the whole pavement, and passers-by had to make way for us.

"This is quite unnecessary, gentlemen," Lukanich chided us gently. "You would do much better to go home."

Nobody wanted to go, however. Only yesterday any one of us might have called this heavy-footed, ungainly man by a mocking nickname; only yesterday he was

merely a teacher, no different from any other; but today he was the hero whom young hearts ever seek and whom they are ready to follow through thick and thin.

I kept trying to get closer to Lukanich, but he took no notice of me. He talked to the others, never once glancing in my direction. It was only when we entered the quiet street where his house stood that Lukanich suddenly turned to me, placed his hand on my shoulder and asked: "How's Gorulya getting on?"

"He's gone away, sir, a long way off, to earn some money."

"Did he go long ago?"

"Over a year."

I was on the alert. Our glances crossed.

"He's a fine man, your Gorulya," said Lukanich, "and a clever one. What a pity there is so much he can't understand—can't, or won't.... Where are you living, Belinets?"

"Nowhere, at present," I answered.

Lukanich slowed down his steps.

"What do you mean, 'nowhere'?"

Reluctantly I told him how my landlady had evicted me the previous evening.

"That's stupid," said Lukanich, frowning. "Extremely stupid. I'll try to find you a place to live, not far from here. It'll only be for a little while, of course, and then I'll apply for a place for you in the hostel for needy scholars. We're thinking of opening one in the near future."

Some days later I wrote a long letter to Gorulya, describing all my misfortunes, all that I had gone through, and how Lukanich had taken my part.

The answer came a month later.

"I am glad, Ivanko, that you stood up for yourself and did not crawl," he wrote. "And you must believe in people, or life will not be worth living. Only I do not

know quite what to say about Fyodor Lukanich. It was good that he was not afraid to take your part, I can say that for him. But his road is not ours, all the same."

Not another word did Gorulya write about Lukanich, he did not even send him regards, and for several days having a guilty feeling on account of this, I felt depressed and tried to avoid meeting the teacher.

We had more occasions to meet now: with ten other needy scholars I had been admitted to the hostel when it opened. It consisted of two large rooms in an unused part of Lukanich's house, which he had offered for the purpose.

Much was made of the opening of the hostel, with the ceremonies attended by all the teachers and by newspapermen as well. The Dumpling delivered a gushing speech on the occasion, saying that the state had undertaken the upkeep of the hostel, and expressing his gratification that so esteemed a pedagogue as Lukanich had agreed to become the educator and mentor of the pupils living there. Then my schoolfellow Yurko Lapchak read an address of gratitude to the President, written by Lukanich in our name. This address was subsequently printed in most of the papers.

The hostel was soon followed by a second act of charity—free dinners in the city alms-house. We went there as soon as lessons were over, sat down at the long tables and ate as quickly as we could, holding our breaths to keep out the sickening stench of mould and carbolic that pervaded the building. We had a vague feeling of humiliation—as though we, young healthy boys, had been put on the same level as helpless cripples and beggars. But there was no alternative. We had to eat that bitter bread and give thanks for it too.

Lukanich often joined our company in the hostel—generally in the evening after we had finished our homework. He was an attentive, interested listener—which flattered us greatly—and at the same time an excellent

narrator. Of the many things he told us, we were particularly interested in stories of the history of our region.

We could almost hear the screams of people burned alive in the churches by Maria Theresa's soldiers because they refused to betray their faith and their language. We could see the long lines of villagers going into the mountains, driven off their fertile land by the Count's myrmidons.

"Now, now, gentlemen," Lukanich would say, sensing the tumult in our hearts. "All that is past and gone, it can never be repeated in our democratic state."

"But, sir," I asked him once, "why is it that people are driven off their land in our Studenitsa to this very day?"

"Who drives them off?"

"A rich farmer called Matlakh."

Lukanich blew his nose loudly in a large blue handkerchief.

"You must understand, gentlemen," he said after a moment's silence. "That, of course, is wrong and arbitrary, or to be more exact, gentlemen, it is something still left over from the past. The government needs time to put an end to injustice everywhere. But truth prevails! It is not in vain that these great words are inscribed on the national emblem of our republic! Truth prevails!"

On Saturdays Lukanich would ask us to his rooms. Other pupils were invited as well, and we read poems and rehearsed one-act plays about the life of the common folk. These flayed drunkenness and greed; the innkeeper was an invariable character—the cause of all the ills and miseries of the people.

We soon tired of this, but the chance to spend an hour or two in a warm, comfortable room and drink sweetened coffee was a great attraction, and we continued seeing Lukanich.

One winter day, when I had got as far as the sixth form, a letter and a parcel arrived from Gorulya.

"Ivanko, lad," he wrote. "Praise be to God, things are going a bit better with me. Some sort of learned gentlemen have come here all the way from Bratislava, and I took them hunting in the mountains. They saw that I was a good hunter and engaged me. I roam the mountains killing the beasts, and an old man here stuffs them and sends them to Bratislava. I watched him and saw how he does it, and I soon learned to do it myself. Now I shall be able to help you more. Work hard at your books, lad. As I reckon it, you have still two years to go. Eh, it's a long time since I saw you, maybe I won't recognize you now. I am sending you trousers, a jacket and boots, only I'm afeared they may not fit you. 'Tis as a small lad that I remember you. And I'm sending you something else, you will see yourself what it is. But the best thing of all I have kept for the last, Ivanko. Maybe Gafia has already told you. I can go back to Studenitsa. Ovsak is dead. Folks say it was not the Lord God who put an end to his life, but Matlakh. Matlakh wanted to buy Ovsak's land, but Ovsak refused to sell it. They fought worse than dogs, and then Matlakh gave the other a glass of wood-alcohol. Now the whole Ovsak family is no more, the police sold the land and Matlakh bought it.

"I want to go home to Studenitsa, Ivanko, but I will have to wait a little. I have to stop and work a year at hunting, maybe I shall be able to put a little by, you know yourself how badly it's needed. . . ."

I was delighted with all the good news. I finished the letter and opened the parcel.

The jacket was tight and the shoes too large, but my joy was nevertheless great. It was a cold winter and my clothes were badly worn; moreover, it was the first time

in my life I had ever possessed clothes which were new, and not made over from old things.

I hunted through the parcel for that "something else" of which Gorulya had spoken, and slipping my hand into a pocket of the jacket, pulled out a thin book with the title: *The Truth about Soviet Russia*.

The booklet had been printed somewhere in Prague; it was in small type and to judge by the worn edges had been read and reread by a great number of people.

I did not show the book even to Ladislav Streča, whose address Gorulya still used in writing to me, but slipped it into my pocket and hurried to the hostel.

Lies were being spread everywhere about the new, Soviet Russia—in the newspapers, at the lessons at school, in sermons at church. These lies confused and blinded people; but in their hearts they preserved their faith in Russia and rejected the lies, although a thousand obstacles kept the truth from them.

On the way to the hostel I longed to take out the book and peep into it, but caution prevailed. Pupils were strictly forbidden to read political literature, even legal publications, and any breach of this rule involved the danger of expulsion.

Arriving in the hostel, I hesitated for a long time about showing the booklet to my school-mates there. First, of course, everybody had to examine and try on my new shoes and jacket; when all had been duly admired, however, I could hold out no longer and showed them the booklet.

"Where did you get that?"

"Found it."

"No, do tell us, Ivanko. . ."

"I'm telling you—I found it."

In a few minutes we were all huddled on the bed by the window, reading. The book was written by somebody who had been in the Soviet land, and it described all that

he had seen there. It contained facts, with practically no comment—about the Volkhov hydro-power station, the first big power station built in Soviet Russia, about student youth, about the first communes and about life in Soviet towns. Brief and terse as they were, these facts drew us into the life of a great country pulsing with vitality, a country which was gathering its forces, gathering them for something great, magnificent. We read it avidly, page after page, never even noticing that darkness was falling, never even thinking to turn on the light and stop straining our eyes by the window.

"What's this you're so absorbed in?"

Lukanich stood behind us. We had not heard him enter.

I jumped up and instinctively hid the book behind me.

"What's this you're so absorbed in?" Lukanich repeated his question.

In my embarrassment, I handed him the book.

Somebody turned on the light. Lukanich went to the table, looked at the title and began turning the leaves.

He stiffened and his eyes narrowed; but he recovered himself at once and his face resumed its calm, genial expression.

"Whose is this?"

"Mine," I said.

Lukanich looked through the book again.

"Interesting! Will you let me have it to read?"

There was nothing for me to do but agree.

I expected Lukanich to ask me where I had got the booklet, but he said nothing. He merely thanked me and put it into his pocket.

For two days we waited, on tenter-hooks, wondering what would happen to us now. Surely Lukanich would not report the incident to the Dumpling? If he did, things would go bad for us. I cursed myself for my lack of caution, and told my comrades that in case of trouble I would

take the whole blame. That, however, comforted nobody. Lukanich, when he met us, said nothing about the booklet, and behaved as though nothing had occurred. That greatly disheartened us. We could not keep our minds on our lessons or our books, we talked in whispers, went to bed earlier than usual and then lay awake.

The third day after the incident with the booklet I was hostel monitor. I rose early in the morning and went out for wood, to heat the stove before school.

On the porch I met Lukanich. He was always up betimes and went out for half-an-hour's constitutional, good weather or bad.

A blizzard had raged during the night, piling up snow against the porch and the gate, but towards morning the wind had died down, the snow had stopped, and now the moon was shining in a clear, starry sky.

Lukanich was in an excellent humour.

"Nothing better than an early morning walk!" he declared, and began stamping down the snow by the porch. "I, for one, feel ten years younger after it!"

"By the way," he added, standing still and looking at me very hard, "you are showing little concern for your future, Belinets."

"Why, sir?"

"That's what I should ask you. You know very well that pupils are forbidden to read political publications. Do you know that, or don't you? Answer me!"

"I do."

"Why did you take that pamphlet into the hostel and start reading it to your schoolfellows instead of bringing it straight to me? Where did you get it?"

I said nothing.

"It's lucky for you that it was I who saw it, and not somebody else. You would not get off so easily this time. . . . What do you want with that book? You are an intellectual, Belinets, not some shepherd or wood-cutter.

You have unusual gifts and you have been given the opportunity to develop them. You ought to think of how best to serve our democratic ideals, and instead of that. . . ."

Lukanich laid a hand on my shoulder.

"In future, don't hide anything from me. I have your interests at heart, rest assured. After all, we are friends, aren't we, Belinets? And about what is said in the book I must have a talk with you all, this evening, perhaps."

A great weight had rolled off my chest. When Lukanich went into the house, I ran back, forgetting all about the wood, wakened my schoolfellows and told them all that he had said.

Lukanich thus gained our full confidence in addition to our liking. From that day on we told him everything, even the smallest trifles.

In the evening Lukanich asked us to his rooms. Snow was falling again like the previous night, and his room with its bookcases and bookshelves and burning stove was warm, quiet and cosy.

Lukanich was wearing soft slippers and a sheepskin Hutsul jacket over a woollen shirt; he paced up and down, casting an occasional glance at the small table by the lamp where the booklet lay.

"There is no doubt," Lukanich told us, "that Soviet Russia is an uncommon country, and that what is happening there is an uncommon thing. But not everything that is suitable for Russia is equally suitable for other countries or acceptable for other peoples. Palms die in our latitude, while Carpathian beeches wither in torrid Africa. . . . You are no longer children, I do not hesitate to talk to you frankly and on any subject. . . ."

"The Communists assert that capitalism is an evil which must be destroyed. . . . An evil!" Lukanich halted for a moment and raised a finger. "I agree that it is evil, but to destroy it is impossible. I myself, gentlemen, have fought against it, and I repeat—impossible! Death, too,

is an evil, gentlemen, but without death, life is inconceivable; they are two sides of the same coin. In two years you will be leaving this school and going out into the world. It is my duty to warn you against extremes. Extremes draw youthful minds, but they bring only disillusionment and grief. I have not read this in books, I know it by experience, I have learned it through suffering, and that is why it is my right and my duty to warn you, my young friends. When two sides disagree, the truth lies somewhere between them, on the middle path—the path of practical, ordinary doings.

"Society does not stand still, my friends, it moves ahead. And capitalism is not what it was a hundred years ago or even five years ago. From internecine struggles it has emerged reborn, its foundation stronger than ever, but at the same time more humane, tolerant, and what is most important—democratic. Our republic, gentlemen, is still young, we cannot demand everything from it all at once. But you must understand that it is futile to compare us with Soviet Russia, we have our own ideal—the democracy of the United States, its humaneness and freedom."

Lukanich spoke long about American democracy, extolling it to the skies. For some reason, however, my mind kept harking back to Matlakh, to my father who had never returned from America, and to the American "editor" with his film-camera, thrusting his dollar at Grandad Gritsan.

11

My childhood wish to find Mikola's key grew into a desire to become an agronomist, a burning desire that gave me no peace. In my last years at school it had such power over me that to it I am indebted for the Dumpling and the professors being compelled most reluctantly to

place me at the head of the list, as top pupil, instead of the son of the cattle-dealer Popovich, whom they would much have preferred to see there. The agricultural college in the ancient Moravian city of Brno became my cherished goal.

To reach this goal, I hired out for three summers to a wealthy market-gardener near Mukachevo, and added heller to heller, denying myself new clothing and boots, contenting myself with cheap cast-offs bought from a second-hand dealer.

Gorulya backed me up in my desire. Just as in the days before I came to the school, he bent every effort to lay something aside for me out of his meagre earnings. In midwinter he would occasionally bring a stuffed bird, or a carved wooden platter he had made, to sell it in Mukachevo.

"But maybe they'll reckon you're looking too high with that college, Ivanko, eh?" he asked on one of these occasions. "I've heard tell it's only the sons of gentry and rich farmers that go there."

"But there are gentry's sons in our school too," I said.

"Aye, but that's not the same," said Gorulya thoughtfully. "School's one thing, college is another. I mind when I was a gamekeeper, I was allowed into the Count's hall a time or two, but never any farther. They may not tell you straight out, Ivanko, they don't do that these days, but they can go roundabout like, tell you the college is full, there's no place. Maybe you'd do better to try something else? Go to some seminary, be a teacher, that's easier for our kind."

"No, *Vuiku*, my mind's set."

"Well, God grant you do it! I'll be real glad for you."

At first I myself was harassed by doubts, until one day Lukanich said: "Don't worry, Belinets. The door of opportunity is open to you."

Never had I heard sweeter music than the cracked voice of the grey-haired principal of the college in Brno, when he first addressed me as "Pan Colleague" in the autumn of 1929!

Lapchak and I stood in the assembly-hall among the other freshmen. Although it was midday, candles were burning; the hall was solemn and chilly; the principal's words echoed back from the walls.

Again newspaper reporters came from Uzhgorod to photograph us and take down our names and villages, as they had when we were admitted to secondary school.

Writing to tell Gorulya of this important event in my life, I asked him to address his letters: Ivan Belinets, Student, 10 Mostna Street, Brno. The house to which I moved belonged to Julius Schillinger, a professor at our college. Our landlord lived with his wife on the first floor, letting the ground and second floors to students.

On that first day, when the new students gathered in the entrance-hall, Julius Schillinger, a hook-nosed man of fifty with long white moustaches, went round among them, stopping here and there to say to a respectful student: "You need a place to live, I suppose? My house on Mostna Street is at your disposal."

He spoke those words with great dignity and, without waiting for a reply, proceeded on his way, the umbrella which served him as a walking-stick tapping the stone floor.

The cubby-hole which I rented was in a half-basement. It was damp, and barely large enough to hold my folding-bed. During the day the bed was stowed away in the cellar and replaced by a small table and chair. The tiny window looked out on a blank wall that shut out most of the light, but I was glad to get even a place like this, so long as I could study.

The house was run by the professor's wife, a small, fragile but very practical woman. The house was her

business, and she had an amazing gift of making a profit out of everything, even her beaming smile. If one of the lodgers could not pay the rent on time, she would tell him kindly: "It doesn't matter, I assure you it doesn't matter a bit! I quite understand how it is. My Julius was once a student himself." And the bill which Pani Schillinger later presented to the comforted student would have an extra crown added.

Julius Schillinger's subject was meadow cultivation; he lectured only to the third- and fourth-year students, and was regarded as one of the pillars of the college. He was free and easy with the students and did not mind spending an hour or two with them in the "Golden Vat" over a mug of beer. He called it being a boy again.

I had little in common with the majority of the other students, most of whom came from well-to-do families and were never short of pocket-money. They spent several days celebrating their admission to college, while I paid three months' rent in advance to Pani Schillinger, put aside the small sum that remained for a rainy day, and went out to look for work.

Now even Brno people are forgetting what it was like, that long, dreary, depressing search for work. My efforts, too, for a long time were fruitless.

Two weeks remained before term started, and every day I set off early in the morning and returned after dark. How many doors I knocked at in those days, how many people I applied to! But everywhere the answer was the same:

"No work!"

At last I found something.

A giant boot crawled slowly along the pavements of Brno, a boot made of papier mâché, covered with black lacquer, a shining boot that reflected everything like a mirror—the passers-by, the shop windows, the faint

autumn sun. People made way for it, staring, and read upon its sides the address of a boot-and-shoe firm.

I was inside that boot; I carried it on my shoulders, holding it steady by a cross-bar. Nobody could see me, but I could see everything through small holes at eye-level. Three days a week I walked the streets inside my boot, the rest of the time it was carried by somebody else.

To get this job, I had had to give an employment agent, whom I happened to meet, more than half of my slender savings; in addition, I had to pay him twenty crowns twice a month, leaving only a hundred for myself.

"Thank your lucky stars, Pan Student," this man observed, counting the money. "You've got work guaranteed for a year, and you needn't worry about vacation time, just let me know beforehand—the boot'll be waiting when you come back."

In the first few days I often heard passers-by laugh; I could not see what the joke was, until I at last realized that I was holding the boot too high and my own worn, patched, down-at-heel shoes were plainly visible beneath the smart, shining dummy.

The money I got from the firm was barely enough to pay my rent and dinners at the canteen, even though I went there only every other day, staying my hunger the rest of the time with weak coffee and bread.

I never had enough to eat, but what of it? I was at college, I was studying, and that was all that mattered.

I lived like a recluse, conscientiously took notes at all the lectures, and read everything I could find about agriculture, always in the hope that just round the corner I would discover that main, most important thing for which I endured all hardship, to which I was dedicating my life.

The other students thought I was obsessed. Perhaps they were right.

I was not content to know the classification of soils and crops; I wanted to find out their properties. Was it possible to make poor soil fertile? How could wheat be made to grow where it had never grown before? But the lectures the professors gave us were stiff and lifeless, and there were many questions to which I received no answer.

"It's too early yet," I consoled myself. "This is only the beginning. The main thing's still ahead."

I was impatient to get to it.

What would I bring back to Verkhovina, what would I be able to give to the people there?

12

In 1930 I went home to spend my first holiday as a student. It was June, a sunny, windless day, when I walked the mountain road again. There had been a thunder-storm in the early morning, and the drops, still clinging to the juniper bushes overhanging the road, sparkled with colour.

Here and there the dark green of the pine-clad mountain-sides was broken by paler patches of maples, as if dozens of children were casting spots of light on it from pieces of mirror.

I was eager to see Gorulya, yet I walked leisurely, looking about me. A wooden box with test-tubes, a comparative atlas and note-books were packed in the knapsack on my back. Wooden covers for a herbarium were fastened to a strap slung over my shoulder, and knocked drily together at every step.

As I passed the small patches of plough-land on the bare foot-hills, I looked at them and wondered: "What does that strip produce for man's benefit? What could it be made to yield?..." I looked at the juniper and pictured

it to myself closing in year by year on the mountain pastures, so dense and strong that the shepherds had to use their axes to it. Sometimes I stopped at a slope swept bare to the naked rock by torrents, measured the depth of the soil and marvelled to find how thin the covering was, yet sufficient to nourish the huge beeches and maples which clung to every crack with their spreading roots.

At midday I came within sight of Studenitsa, hemmed in by the mountains. I stopped for a moment, happy, drinking in the sight of my native village.

A shadow lay on the bottom of the valley where the road wound in and out among the trees, but the mountain-sides were bathed in sunshine.

There was the long cottage squatting by the stream, where the big Gritsan family lived. And wasn't that Grandad himself, standing by the door? There was the Rushchaks' cottage, with smoke curling lazily from the chimney, and up above, the highest of all, stood Gorulya's home. Weariness forgotten, I ran towards it, waving my hat.

Gorulya was at home. The previous day he had come down for salt from the mountain pasture, where he was in charge of the Studenitsa flock. I saw him sitting by the door, putting laces into a new pair of rough leather shoes.

I cried out. Gorulya raised his head and stared at me as though I were a stranger. Had I really changed so much in these years that he could not recognize me?

"Ivan!" he shouted at last. "It's Ivan! . . ."

He took a few steps forward, stopped as though still unable to believe his eyes, then walked round me, his head on one side, examining me as though I were a calf he was buying.

"Ivan!" he repeated. "Sure enough, it's Ivan!"

Then at last he flung his arms apart and gave me such a bear's hug that my breath was stopped and my very bones cracked.

"You wrote you weren't coming this year either," said Gorulya, helping me off with my knapsack.

"I did, but I changed my mind," I answered.

"Well, and thank God for it." Gorulya glanced round and then shouted: "Gafia!... She's having a chat with a neighbour.... Gafia-a-a-a!"

Gafia, however, was already hurrying to the cottage. She recognized me at once and her face lighted up with a shy joy.

"Here's someone for you to make welcome, Gafia," said Gorulya.

"I'll make him welcome all right," she answered. "It's you that keeps him out here in the yard, can't even ask him in!"

We went into the cottage. It seemed somehow smaller than I remembered it. Gafia embraced me and then busied herself at the stove.

I sat down on the bench, conscious of a slight, pleasant ache in my feet from the long walk. Gorulya stumped up and down, then seated himself beside me and began asking me about my life and studies. Everything interested him—the college, the students and the city of Brno itself.

"And how are you going on, *Vuiku*?" I asked when I could get a word in.

Gorulya's only answer was a snort.

"He's got to be a real bad-tempered old man," said Gafia and sighed.

"Bad-tempered?" Gorulya laughed grimly. "What's there to make me otherwise? I've been about here and I've been in Slovakia, I've seen how folks live. And not a bit of happiness have I seen. It's all just the way it was before, naught's changed. It makes me boil, Ivankol And there's our Communists from Svalyava, they say I'm impatient, they even called me a bad name, called me an an-ar-chist, when I said I'd get some others together and

we'd take to the forest as Mikola Shugai had done once." Gorulya brought his fist down on the table with a crash. "And why not? What d'you think? I'll do it, too!"

"No, *Vuiku*, you won't," I said.

"Why not?" Gorulya scowled.

"You know yourself that it's no good, that it won't help the people."

"So that's the way you're talking, is it?" observed Gorulya, his head on one side. "And what is going to help them, tell me that—your science?"

"Maybe."

"That means you don't know either," Gorulya said, shaking his head.

"Ilko, you might draw some water," Gafia said.

Gorulya rose, picked up the bucket and went silently out. Gafia sighed.

"He feels badly," she said. "He's angry with everybody, and himself too. He's seeking something and he can't find it. Mother of God grant he cheers up a bit now you're here."

Gorulya's scowl was not so black when he returned with the water.

"Have you come for long, Ivanko?" he asked, taking out his tobacco-pouch and breaking a splinter off a log to clean his pipe.

"The whole summer."

"That's good. You'll be able to rest a bit. I suppose students need a rest now and again, too?"

"I shan't do much resting."

"How's that?" Gorulya asked anxiously.

"This may be my first step, the beginning of all I've planned. . . . How many years have you been living on this land? Forty-five, is it?"

"You can add a couple more," said Gorulya.

"And Fyodor Skripka longer than you, and Grandad Vasil Gritsan longer than Skripka. And what do we know

about our land except that God's forgotten it? We don't know a thing."

"Maybe you're right." Ilko shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, so I want to go about a bit, collect all the grasses that grow here, study their properties, find out what suits them and what doesn't. I'll have to get soil from various places and test it—from the plough-land and the pastures. Why, even Granny Lozanikha has a different spell for every illness, and we've never even asked our soil what ails it!"

I told him all I planned to do during the summer, and Gorulya listened carefully, mechanically scraping away with the splinter at his old scorched pipe.

I finished talking, but Gorulya went on cleaning his pipe for another moment before he looked up at me and asked with a smile: "Will you be needing helpers, or are you going to do it all on your own, like?"

"Of course I'll need helpers!" I cried.

"Maybe you'll take me on? I won't be wanting big wages!" Gorulya laughed good-humouredly.

I could see that he felt a lively interest in my plan and a high regard for it. His flowing energy sought an outlet, and the work ahead attracted him strongly.

"When shall we start?" he asked.

"Tomorrow, if you like."

"I'm going up to the pasture tonight. Come with me?" I agreed at once.

"That's settled, then!" said Gorulya. "What's the good of hanging around here in the village? We'll fix up a hut there, and collect all the grasses you want! Just tell us what you need. But first you'd better get a bite to eat and rest a while before we start."

I had no intention to rest, however. I was impatient to see Semyon Rushchak, Olena, Grandad Gritsan. How were they getting along? I had asked about them every

time I wrote to Gorulya, but he had always answered in the same words: "Still alive."

The news of my arrival spread swiftly through the village, and the first to come and see me was my childhood friend Semyon Rushchak. He was carrying in his arms a little girl of about three with thin flaxen pigtails.

"Is this your daughter?" I asked.

"Yes, mine," he said, stroking her head.

"What's your name?"

The little girl turned away shyly and hid her face in her father's shoulder.

"Come on, now, what is your name?" Semyon urged her.

"Kalinka," came the reply in a barely audible whisper.

So Semyon Rushchak already had a daughter called Kalinka.

"She looks just like you," I told Semyon.

"She takes after her mother too," he said with a smile.

"And what is your mother's name?" I asked the child, who was now looking at me a little more trustfully.

Semyon guessed the thought behind my question.

"Not Olena, Ivan," he said. "Not Olena. . . . It didn't work out. . . ."

From his tone I could not guess whether he was sorry or not.

"It didn't work out," Semyon repeated. "I had to divide the land with my sisters, and my strip wasn't big enough to farm with Olena. And farming's the only thing I'm any good for. There's others, now, they go and work in the forest, or somewhere else, but me, I've got to be in the fields, like as though they pull me. . . . Well, so I married another maid. . . ."

Semyon set Kalinka carefully down on the floor, sighed and rolled a cigarette.

"The land, the land!" he went on. "You mind all we hoped for, when there was talk of that land reform, when

they started selling the Count's estate? They fixed up what they called a qualification for all as wanted to buy it, and the way it worked was that only Matlakh and his sort could get any, and the Latoritsa¹ firm grabbed the most of it. It was just changing Schönborn for Latoritsa. And that was the end of your land reform. . . ."

Semyon did not want to smoke indoors, so we went out into the yard and sat down on the grass under a tree. At first the little girl clung to her father, but soon she saw a cat basking in the sunshine and with her hands behind her back strode over to it.

"Where's Olenka now?" I asked cautiously.

"Still hiring out, in the villages round about," said Semyon, drawing on his cigarette. "They married her off to Mikola Shtefak. . . ."

"But he's an old man!"

"An orphan's lucky to get that," said Semyon. "They lived together two years and she had a boy, then Shtefak died. So she had to go out to work again—sometimes for Matlakh and sometimes in other villages. I haven't seen her for a month now. Folks say Matlakh sent her to Veretski, he's got land there too. He's got land everywhere now, Matlakh has. Ah, if a bit of that was mine, what I'd do with it!"

"How much have you?"

"Little enough," said Semyon. "There's my strip, and a strip my wife brought me, and the rest belongs to my wife's brothers. They went to Belgium to work in the mines, and when they come back I'll have to give it up to them. Eh, you should have seen what that land was like, naught but stones and bushes. I worked two years from morn to night clearing it. Folks laughed at me, but I took no heed of them and went on."

¹ Latoritsa—a French-Belgian-Swiss firm.—*Ed.*

Semyon stretched mightily, as though the very memory of that heavy toil were sweet to him.

"They don't laugh now, though," he went on. "They come and look, and they're amazed when they see what that land's like. But what do I get out of it? Even in good years I barely have enough to eat, the taxes take it all. Chimney tax, wheel tax, a tax for chair and table. . . ." He stopped, giving me a searching wistful look, and continued: "There's times I get weary of it all, Ivanko, weary and sick! I can't rest, I go on working, but I'm sick, sick at heart. . . . What's wrong wi' me when I get that way, Ivanko, maybe you can tell me?"

I stared at Semyon, his outburst had been so sudden. But he did not wait for any answer.

"I'm fond of my wife and my girl, and the land—I can't go away from it, but there's no joy in me. It's like standing in the middle of the world with your hands and feet all tied. . . . I've never said ought o' this to anyone else, Ivanko, but now I just couldn't keep it in."

He stopped, frowned, and our talk broke off.

Semyon was followed by other old friends, among them Fyodor Skripka and Grandad Gritsan, the latter now quite deaf, and using an ox-horn as an ear-trumpet. They had all known me from childhood, but a certain wariness in their manner showed that they no longer regarded me as one of their own, but rather as fortune's favourite who had managed to become a gentleman—and with the gentry you had to be careful. To a certain extent, however, I was still Ivanko to them, son of Osip Belinets, and they showered me with questions, wanting to know the price of maize in the parts where I lived, what I earned and whether I had heard anything about Russia.

"I've heard tell there's another man at the head of that country come after Lenin," said Grandad Gritsan,

squinting in the strong sunshine. "Folks say he's from Verkhovina way."

"Not Verkhovina, Grandad," Semyon Rushchak corrected the old man. "From the Caucasus."

"Well, all the same from the mountains."

"And Ilko read us in the newspaper," Fyodor Skripka thrust in, "that there, in Russia, folks have started tilling the land together. . . ." He turned to Gorulya. "Hey, Ilkol What did you say they called it?"

"Kolkhoz—collective farm," came the answer.

"Aye, and they're building a lot of things, too."

"I wouldn't mind being there, eh, neighbours?" said Skripka with a sigh.

When I asked our visitors how things were going with them, however, they answered shortly and evasively, glancing uneasily at each other, fearing to say too much. They were quite ready to tell me in great detail about how wolves had killed Matlakh's cow, and how the inn-keeper's wife had been nearly suffocated by fumes from the stove; I listened to it all with half an ear, aware that the happenings they dug up interested nobody, not even themselves, that they were talking about them only to hide from a stranger the things which were really uppermost in their minds.

Gorulya said nothing.

I turned the talk to the crops, and the ice was broken and the constraint faded away. They talked eagerly, interrupting each other, and even Gorulya emerged from his sombre silence. After all, what could be more important to these people than the crops?

Despite his great age, Grandad Gritsan had an amazing memory. He could remember what harvests he had got in the various years, what the weather had been like that summer, when he had started sowing and when he had reaped. Such things were of the greatest importance for the work I had in mind. I pulled my note-book out

of my pocket, but at once the old man broke off short, peered at the sun with narrowed eyes and said: "Nay, it's all wrong what I'm telling you; my memory's not what it used to be. . . . Eh, and the sun's nearly down and I never heeded. . . . Time for me to be getting off home. . . . God be wi' you!"

The others, too, quickly took their leave.

When they were all gone, Gorulya said: "You keep that pad of yours out of the way, Ivan. Folks don't like the look of 'em. There's the lawyer goes round the houses with his pad, and the executor collects taxes with a book in his hand, and the forester writes down fines in one, and if anything happens, there's the gendarme writing everything down. And Matlakh, he's got his pad too. . . . Every trouble, and out comes one o' those pads. . . ."

"But I'm not the elder or the executor!"

"Now don't be getting huffy, Ivanko," said Gorulya reproachfully. "These aren't the folks to be angry with!"

In the evening Gorulya and I went up to the pasture. The path beaten by generations of Carpathian shepherds wound steeply up through the woods. It would run level along a narrow ledge as though relaxing, crawl over a bridge crossing a swift stream, and then climb on again straight up the mountain-side.

All trace of the morning's thunder-storm had long disappeared from the meadows and plough-land, but the forest still retained the memory of it. The soil was moist, and drops glistened on the bracken and on the grass, pushing here and there through last year's dried leaves. The moist, pungent smell of mushrooms mingling with the fragrance of sun-warmed pines was intoxicating; it was enough to turn your head.

As we mounted, the forest began to thin out. We left the beeches below us, their leafy crowns rustling in the slight mountain breeze, but the pines still clung on stubbornly. Here, on the heights, they lost their slender straightness

and became stunted and gnarled. Then they, too, gave up, and only the steep lofty meadows stretched before us.

Now that we emerged from the forest, the towering mountains which it had concealed stood before us in all their solemn majesty. Peak after peak they rose. Evening shadows glided over them and settled on their sides, as though somebody were drawing curtains, one after the other. Waves of fragrance from the mountain grasses drifted through the air. Wading through the tall camomiles, we made our way down into the gully where the sheep-pens stood.

The shaggy dogs welcomed Gorulya with joyful barking. Even the sheep recognized the voice of the head shepherd and drifted slowly towards him.

The days that followed were filled with careful, fascinating research. I rose at dawn with the shepherds, washed in the dew which one could scoop up from the grass with one's hands like water from a brook, hastily breakfasted on oat-cake and a bowl of sour milk, and set off on excursions, some short, some long. I was not content with classifying and pressing the grasses I saw, I made note where they grew better and where worse, and collected the various kinds of soil to analyze in the makeshift laboratory I had fitted up in the hut.

On rainy days, or when sudden storms swept the mountains and the sheep, huddled together, started at each thunder-clap, I refused to stay under shelter, and despite Gorulya's expostulations went out and lay down on a slope, watching the tiny trickles of water flowing into each other like rivers on a map, boring their way through the soil, carrying away its fine particles. One had only to look carefully to see among the grass the traces of millions of these trickles, like marks left by certain insects on trees.

"Hey! *Vuikul!*" I called. "Look what's happening to our soil. . . . Come over here!"

Gorulya hurried out into the rain, squatted down beside me, and together we watched the destructive work of those seemingly innocent trickles.

"Our soil's light," said Gorulya sadly. "It's got no weight to it."

Then we rose and ran to other places where patches of clover and wild oats grew. Here there were none of these trickles boring their way down. The strong, spreading roots held the soil together, and instead of giving way to the water it sucked it in, although the slope here was much steeper.

"The soil's different here, Ivanko," Gorulya observed. "Only a dozen paces apart, but different, isn't it?"

"The soil's the same," I answered. "But the grasses on it are different."

"Wait a bit, wait a bit." Gorulya caught my sleeve and his wet brows drew together in concentrated thought. "The soil feeds the grass and the grass helps the soil, like. . . . Stop a bit, stop a bit. . . ."

He found it difficult to put into words the idea which was stirring vaguely in his mind.

Nor was Gorulya my only helper; the other shepherds, too, were interested in my work and brought me samples of rare grasses and the soil under them from outlying parts of the pastures.

Most of my time, however, I spent in the fields that clung in tiny patches to the slopes—sometimes so steep that the peasants had to carry the manure up in sacks on their own bent, sweating backs. It was weary, heart-breaking work, a stubborn labour that was only too often fruitless. One heavy shower was enough to wash away all that had been carried up with so much effort.

How many times have I seen the tears of anger in a woman's eyes, how many times have I seen a peasant, hurrying to his field after one of these storms, fling his

hat on the ground and curse until his voice failed. But the tears were dried by the mountain wind, curses gave out at last, and nothing remained but to spread manure on the land again—if the peasant had any—or else to give up, plough and sow the field as it was and get a meagre crop.

"How can all this be altered?" I asked myself. "What forces lie locked within our mountain land? And if they are released, how can they be made to work?"

I went down to the village and had long talks with the people there. They had now stopped regarding me as a stranger, and even Grandad Gritsan no longer feared my pad.

As I patiently continued my research and collected data, as my note-books filled up and the dried grasses in my herbarium increased, the "whys" and "hows" nagged at my mind day and night, giving me no peace.

13

The summer passed, and I returned to Brno with a big herbarium of grasses and three thick note-books. I was so pleased with the results of my summer's work that when I found my shoe firm had gone bankrupt I took the blow with comparative equanimity.

The giant boot lay crumpled and shedding its lacquer in the factory yard, and I was without a job again.

"It can't be helped," said the employment agent, shrugging his shoulders. "Bát'a has a big appetite—he swallows firm after firm like an elephant swallows buns. But don't you worry—I'll try to get you a job as a bill-poster on the same terms."

I returned home feeling quite hopeful, and decided to ask Schillinger that very evening to look through my herbarium and my notes.

Pani Schillinger herself opened the door. Before I had time to ask if her husband could see me, the door of one of the rooms opened and a rather plump young woman came out into the hall. She was followed by a man of about thirty-five with a long, bored face, and by Schillinger himself. The young woman paused to pull on her gloves, talking meanwhile to Schillinger, while the other man, holding his hat, stood silently waiting in weary respect. I had seen this man occasionally at college; he was the Schillingers' son-in-law, Jaroslav Marek, and the woman was their daughter. The young couple lived somewhere at the other end of the city, and rarely visited the Schillingers.

Schillinger was not nearly as imposing at home as he was at college. He even went so far as to smile and greet me—although he did not shake hands.

At first I felt awkward, but I plucked up courage, and without even waiting for the visitors to leave, said loudly and resolutely: "I have spent the whole summer in the Carpathians, sir."

I must have looked not only resolute, but somewhat foolish, for Schillinger smiled.

"Well, I'm sure that's very nice," he observed. "You come from there, don't you, from—what is it, now—from Sub-Carpathian Rus, I think."

I nodded.

"I'm very glad that you have had a good rest before the new term," the professor continued.

"I haven't been resting, sir," I blurted out, fearing that our talk might end before it had begun. "I've been working. I've got together a herbarium, analyzed the soil, made notes of my observations, collected statistics, and I have a great many questions which I hope you will answer for me."

I poured all this out so eagerly that Schillinger stopped smiling, and not only his daughter, but the son-in-law,

too, turned to look at me, a shadow of something like animation flickering over his bored face.

"What are your questions?" asked Schillinger, without any very great pleasure in his voice.

I had nothing to lose. I began to talk about Verkhovina, about the eternal poverty and hunger there, about my urge to study, and all the "whys" and "hows" that tormented me day and night. As I spoke I saw before me the endless winters of starvation, my mother's swollen legs, the barren fields, and cattle bellowing with hunger. . . .

When I ended, everybody looked rather uncomfortable. Even Marek dropped his eyes.

"What do you want, then?" Schillinger asked cautiously.

"From you, only one thing, sir," I said quietly, looking straight at him. "I want advice about what to do to make the land there fertile, to make rye and wheat grow there, instead of only oats."

"You want to turn barren soil into the Garden of Eden?" Schillinger asked ironically. "Is that it?"

"Not quite, sir. I am not talking of the Garden of Eden."

"Just the same," Schillinger interrupted, "you want that which is, alas, beyond the power of science to give. Of course," he continued, raising a hand, "science can to a certain extent sway Nature and the lives of men, but only to a certain extent, Pan Student. This extent is limited. Nature is wiser than we are, for it is not we who have made her, but she who made us with bold dreams but feeble hands that mock at our overweening pride."

Schillinger broke off and turned to his son-in-law.

"Be so kind, Jaroslav, as to go through Pan Belinets' herbarium; you may find some interesting specimens there."

Marek bowed politely.

"When can you show me your herbarium?"

"At any time convenient for you."

He said nothing more, but began taking leave of the Schillingers.

The three of us went down the stairs together, and barely had the door of the flat closed behind us than I saw an amazing change in Marek; his eyes behind their pince-nez took on a lively sparkle, and he let the air out of his lungs in such a noisy "poof!" that his wife exclaimed reproachfully: "Jaroslav!"

He did not apologize, but turned to me and said in a surprisingly simple, friendly and boyishly gay manner: "I tell you what, Belinets, get your notes and herbarium—everything you've collected—and come along to my place."

"When will it be convenient for you, Pan Marek?" I asked, taken aback.

"When?" he cried. "Today! Now, this very minute! We'll wait for you at the gate."

A few minutes later we were sitting in a cab, with its leather-upholstered top drawn.

It was a rainy evening with a touch of autumn tang in the air. I settled down on the tip-up seat from which I could see nothing but the legs of passers-by and the wet gleam of the pavement reflecting the lights of shop windows.

We rode in silence, and in silence we entered the small brick house standing in a garden.

Jaroslav Marek led me into his study, a fairly large room, with the wide latticed windows common in Czech houses and filling the whole of one wall. There were a great many books, a great many tubs and pots with plants of various kinds, and that cosy disorder that makes one feel at ease and in a mood for talk, work or rest.

Marek began pacing up and down, frowning and rubbing his hands. I noticed that they were large, gnarled and brown, like those of a farm-labourer.

"It makes me sick!" he burst out. "It makes me physically sick to listen to that preacher who thinks he is a scientist. . . . It wouldn't matter what he thinks—the trouble is that others think the same! And they believe in him just as I did once. . . . A country priest with nothing to teach but fear of God! . . . Oh, to hell with him! Damn family duties, damn those visits! . . . Let's see the stuff you've brought."

I handed him the herbarium, but he put it aside and took my note-books filled with large, clear writing, settled down in an arm-chair and was soon absorbed in them, forgetting my presence completely.

He read for a long time, often rereading some page, but not once did he look up at me.

It is hard to say how many hours I would have had to sit there, tortured with suspense, if the study door had not opened and Pani Marek's winsome face under a mass of fair hair had not peeped in.

"Jaroslav, coffee! Pan Belinets, coffee!"

Marek reluctantly tore himself away from his reading, thanked her and said that he did not want coffee.

"Fie!" she cried in mock anger, and turned to me. "You'll keep me company, won't you, Pan Belinets?"

I hesitated awkwardly, but Marek said: "Go along. Don't stand on ceremony, I can concentrate better when you're not here."

"That's the man I have to live with!" cried my hostess gaily; she took me by the arm and led me into the kitchen-living-room.

China cups shone on a small table by the window, a coffee-pot was bubbling, sandwiches lay on plates, and it cost me no small effort to pretend indifference to them.

We drank our coffee, chatting about this and that; I do not know what there was in me to draw forth Pani Marek's confidences, but almost at once she started telling me her family troubles.



"If it wasn't for me, Pan Belinets, I don't know what would happen. . . . They can't stand each other. . . . You've no idea how hard it makes things!"

She mentioned no names, but I understood that she was referring to her father and husband.

"Of course my Jaroslav knows more than all the rest of them put together," she went on. "If only he were a little more tolerant and tactful, he would have been a university teacher long ago. But that's just the trouble—he's stubborn, he always says what he thinks, and you know, Pan Belinets, one has to be a bit of a diplomat to get on."

She smiled sadly and looked questioningly at me, as though expecting me to agree. But I said nothing and carefully stirred my coffee in which the sugar had melted long ago.

"It all started with Jaroslav's experiments in hybridization," she said and sighed. "We grew some wonderful fruit in our garden that stood the worst winters. Goodness, weren't we delighted! We couldn't leave those trees, we were always going out to look at them, and Jaroslav kept saying that that Russian, Michurin, was a great scientist. People came from Prague to look at our fruit. But Father said that crossing was against Nature and Jaroslav's work was a trivial occupation for a man of science. And then my Jaroslav called him an obscurantist and a lot more too."

Pani Marek paused and sighed again.

"I used to think it was only politics or personal things that made people enemies, not science. . . . I don't blame Jaroslav, he's selfless and absolutely straight and honest, but life is none too easy for men like that."

Drinking coffee and chatting, we did not notice how the time slipped by until Jaroslav Marek came into the kitchen, my note-books in hand. He stopped, gave me a

long, searching and rather surprised look, then asked: "What year are you in, Pan Belinets?"

"This will be my second," I answered, rising from my stool.

"Sit down," Marek ordered me sternly and began pacing up and down the kitchen. "Well," he said, stopping beside me, "I'm very glad I made your acquaintance. What I have read in your as yet disjointed and unsystematized notes would do credit not only to a second-year student, but to many of us who have dedicated ourselves to science. I'm not paying you compliments, Pan Belinets, I say it for it is my firm conviction. You have reached boldly into the sphere of mountain agriculture which so far, unfortunately, has been little studied. But do you know what interests me most in your notes? Your grasses! Grass has a great future, I think you've realized that yourself, to judge by the importance you attach to it. You have the instinct of a scientist. Grasses mean fertile soil, they mean the end of primitive methods of grain cultivation."

Marek pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Have you ever heard anything about Siberia?"

The question was unexpected. I confessed that my knowledge of that region was very vague; all I practically knew about it was that it had a severe climate.

"It's severe, no doubt about that," Marek said. "I spent four years there as a prisoner of war. And if it hadn't been for those years in Siberia, I'd still have been an ignoramus under Schillinger's wing. But I happened to meet a railway clerk there, a man called Korzunov, who went in for horticulture. He was growing fruit-trees in Siberia! Have you any idea what that means, Pan Belinets? No? It's like trying to grow date-palms here under my window. Fantastic! But that railway clerk did it—I myself ate apples from his orchard!... Of course, it wasn't easy, it meant a lot of hard work, and Korzunov

told me that he had been getting a great deal of help from a man called Michurin, a Soviet horticulturist, with whom he corresponded. Of course, for me he was but 'a man called Michurin,' but for Korzunov he was *the* authority. And when Korzunov read me the letters from that horticulturist in Tambov Gubernia and a few of his booklets, I realized that men like that are born once in a century. I suppose you've never heard of him either?"

"No, I can't say I have," I admitted.

Marek sat in thoughtful silence for a few moments, then said: "It's criminal, how little we know of the Russians. About some third-rate scientist of the West we get whole volumes printed on fine paper with portraits of his great-grandmothers, but when someone proves by his work that man can mould Nature, dictate his terms to her—there is dead silence! And just think what that means, Pan Belinets—to dictate terms to Nature, to transform Nature! Why, it's tremendous! And most important of all, it's possible! The Russians are proving it at every step, especially now. Mankind owes much to them and will owe a great deal more as time goes on. . . ."

As Marek spoke of Russia, I thought of my own land—a small particle forcibly torn away, but nevertheless a particle of that great country; and I glowed with the thought that I could call the people who had given the world such splendid things—my own people.

It was late when I left Marek. I walked on air, oblivious of the rain and the penetrating damp of the autumn night.

14

After that evening I became a frequent visitor at the Mareks'. I was drawn there not only by the hospitality of my hosts, but mainly by the interesting discussions we had and by books which could not be found in the

college library. Jaroslav Marek selected them for me according to some system known to him alone, and when I arrived a little pile would be awaiting me, always in the same place. Sometimes I barely had time to enter and wipe my feet before Marek called from his study: "Is that you, Pan Belinets? Look what I've found for you!" And he would come out into the hall waving some book, pamphlet or magazine over his head.

"Heavens above, man, what a time you take! Get your things off quick and sit down and read this!"

He would lead me into the study and then give me the book—by Williams, Dokuchayev, Michurin. . . . It was not in the college, but here, in his house, that I first heard the names of these Russian champions of science, as Marek called them.

I had my own place in the study—by a small table which held a shaded lamp, a pile of paper and well-sharpened pencils. I would sit down and start reading, and Marek would tiptoe away to his own table and turn to his work. The next minute, however, he would look up at me in eager impatience.

"Well—do you understand now what real science is?"

I had had no time to understand anything; in the minute that had passed I had barely read half of the first page, but Marek could not sit still.

"When they start carefully explaining to you that what's bad is bad, that's not science," he cried heatedly. "But when they teach you how to overcome what's bad, how to fight it, when a scientist's book gives you courage and faith, and makes you want to roll up your sleeves and tackle the job, then, Pan Belinets, take off your hat to that science, for it is genuine. . . ." Then suddenly dropping his voice to a whisper he said: "I'm sorry, I won't disturb you any more."

Marek hated politics and all political talk irritat-

ed him intensely. Nevertheless, I often found him surrounded by piles of newspapers of all shades and tendencies.

"A pretty picture!" he would cry, brandishing some sheets at me. "Fifty different parties and only one that is decent. I don't agree with the Communists about a lot of things, but to give them their due, they are at least honest, while the rest are muck. Always shouting about how much they love the people, how they defend the people, and acting like blackguards! . . . We've got to steer clear of politics, Pan Belinets. We have to serve the people by our science. They're so blind they won't recognize Michurin, they won't recognize Williams—'Bolsheviks,' they yell! Marek calls Michurin and Williams great scientists—so Marek's a Red and they barely tolerate him at the college. Crass stupidity! It wasn't their politics that gave men electric light, the Periodic Table, or a vaccine against cholera. All it did was burn scientists at the stake, shut them up in dungeons, strangle talent and get people killing each other in wars! . . ."

Nevertheless, he subscribed to a large number of newspapers and read them all. When I asked him why he read them, hating politics as he did, he answered: "I'm giving my disgust with our politicians something to feed on."

Everything Marek said was convincing. He was sincere and honest to the highest degree.

I accepted his point of view because I had already come up against corruption and dirty dealings at the college. A good many students received scholarships from various parties. Some of these, of course, really did believe they possessed political convictions, but the majority were ready to side with any party that paid them. It was because of this that I fell out with a senior called Lapchak, who came from my own district. To my surprise, he suddenly received a grant from the National-

ist party, which in our parts was led by the Uniate priest, Father Voloshin.

"Look here, Belinets," said Lapchak one day. "Haven't you had enough of hunting for work? You're a Ukrainian, write to Voloshin and you'll get a scholarship like mine."

"I'm not going to sell myself!" I snapped, and from that day on I ignored Lapchak.

Like the other scholarship students, he seldom attended lectures, spending his time at the "Golden Vat" in arguments, which ended in drunken sprees.

Acting on Jaroslav Marek's advice, I worked on farms near Brno in the winter and summer vacations.

"Don't turn up your nose at any farm work, whatever it is," Marek told me. "You've got to be able to do everything—plough and look after cattle, milk cows and shear sheep—everything, absolutely everything! Practical work is not only the continuation of science, it's an essential part of it!"

In the spring of my third year the Governor of our region came to Brno. The news of his arrival appeared in all the papers, and a few days later many Brno students from Sub-Carpathian Rus, including myself, received gilt-edged cards covered with copperplate writing.

"Pan Belinets," I read, "the Governor of Sub-Carpathian Rus requests your company for supper at the 'Golden Vat' on the 16th at 7 p.m."

It goes without saying that I had never before received an invitation to supper from such a highly-placed person as a governor, and at first I thought somebody was playing a practical joke on me. I soon discovered, however, that I was not the only one to be so honoured. Many of our Sub-Carpathian students had received the same gilt-edged invitation-cards.

We gathered in the beer-cellar long before the appointed time. Lapchak was there, and so was my old

enemy Kovač—now in his fourth year at my own college, and again held in high esteem by the teachers for his prowess on the football field.

All day the "Golden Vat" had been filled with hustle and bustle. The proprietor, a Sudeten German, had set all his family to scrubbing and washing the dark oak-panelled parlour divided off from the main hall by an archway. This entrance was now hung with heavy curtains, and the proprietor, after scrutinizing our invitation-cards, let us through into the brilliantly-lighted room beyond, where a long polished table in the middle was set with old-fashioned earthenware plates and beer-mugs. In the corner stood a tall grandfather clock which had always shown the same time. Today, however, it had been set going and slowly chimed every quarter of an hour.

At last the hand trembled and the clock wheezily struck the hour. On the seventh stroke the Governor entered, followed by his suite. He was a man of about sixty, with a longish face and a thin, long nose. He halted for a moment, smiling, and stretching out his hands as though we were old friends whom he desired to press to his bosom.

Lapchak began to applaud and the others followed suit. The Governor dropped his eyes and raised a hand in protest.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, no ceremony, please. Today I am a student among students."

That went down well, and the applause grew louder.

After Lapchak had read a speech of welcome on behalf of the Sub-Carpathian students and toasts had been drunk to the republic, to the President, to progress and science, the Governor expressed a wish to join us in a student song.

He sang out of tune and the words he had either forgotten or never known, but that did not trouble him.

The Governor's free and easy manner won us over. We were flattered to find such an important personage treating us as equals.

Then he beckoned the students one by one, made them sit down and had a long conversation with each, while his suite talked to the rest. In due course I too found myself sitting beside the Governor.

"Belinets?" he repeated on hearing my name, and his eyes roved in some surprise over my worn jacket, too short in the sleeves, and my well-pressed but mended trousers. "So you are Belinets? You're the one whose research work is so highly praised by the college authorities?"

I said nothing.

A look of something midway between surprise and disappointment flashed into the Governor's face—as though he had expected me to be quite another person. But it was immediately smoothed into an ingratiating smile.

"That does honour not to you alone," the Governor pronounced, "but to all of us, your countrymen."

He inquired where I came from and how long I had been studying. I had already decided how to conduct myself and replied briefly and with restraint, careful to avoid anything even faintly resembling servility.

"And what made you take up agronomy?" the Governor asked with some curiosity.

"Verkhovina," I answered.

"Verkhovina? I don't quite understand."

I forgot my resolution to be brief.

The Governor listened blandly while I spoke of the soil and my work on grasses. However, as soon as I mentioned the peasants' tiny patches of land, wedged in between the estates belonging to the Latoritsa firm and the wealthy men of Verkhovina, his face changed and he interrupted me.

"I don't think we will discuss the property question here, Pan Belinets," he said curtly. "You should know that property rights are sacred and protected by the laws of our republic." The next moment, however, evidently wishing to soften the impression of his words, he continued in a benevolent tone: "Of course, I understand the position, I assure you that Verkhovina is our constant concern, and the government will look for ways to help the people there. Yes. And your work with grasses, Pan Belinets, is very interesting, very interesting indeed!"

He spoke of science, of its greatness and its importance for the country's prosperity, and concluded by praising me for having taken up agronomy.

In spite of the Governor's general evasiveness, his homage to science pleased me. In my simplicity I believed every flattering word, and my head was in a whirl. "One of these days," I thought, "I'll convince this enlightened man who is so devoted to science. It's clear he doesn't know what goes on there, in Verkhovina. It wasn't tactful of me to push all these troubles on to him at a party. But later on I'll be able to open his eyes."

15

A year and a half later I was in the east-bound train from Prague to the Carpathians, a full-fledged agronomist with the diploma of the Brno college.

There is a saying to the effect that if Fortune smiles once she smiles twice. I had just passed my exams and was racking my brains, wondering how to find the money to pay my landlady and my debts at the canteen, and to make myself look more or less presentable as befitted a college graduate, when a purchaser at last turned up in Verkhovina for my old cottage which had been standing with boarded-up windows for so many years.

After the graduation exercises I allowed myself for once to join my fellow-students in the "Golden Vat." I had bought an overcoat, a suit, and a dark-green hat to replace my old cap, and put by the small sum that remained for a rainy day, although I was confident that from now on good fortune and success would be mine.

I was glowing with hope, bubbling over with energy as I travelled home, eager to get to work, naively certain that the way was now open for the realization of all my altruistic plans.

For many long days I had turned over and over in my mind the report on grasses I intended to send to the government of our region. I already knew it by heart, I could have recited it word for word. The title was unpretentious, perhaps even commonplace—"A Memorandum on Grasses." The only thing remaining was to get the report on to paper, and that I intended to do at home.

I was impatient to meet Gorulya, I pictured to myself the moment when after the first boisterous rejoicings of welcome I would impart to him all my cherished plans. And yet, when I thought of that coming talk I felt a kind of uneasiness, as though I were about to face an examination infinitely more serious than the ones I had taken at college. "Suppose Gorulya doesn't see it all as I do?" I thought. "Maybe I'd better tell him later, when it's all written and ready?"

Gorulya's sceptical, often harsh attitude to much that appeared right and sensible to me acted as a deterrent. Something had held me back from writing to him about my meeting with the Governor in Brno. Now, sitting in the train, I decided that I would not for the present tell Gorulya of my plans and hopes, I would just tell him that I was writing a scientific paper.

Gorulya knew that I was coming, and he walked three miles to meet me. How proudly he led me through the village! As we passed the houses, he would stop for

a moment and call out: "Hey, neighbour! See who's come! Ivan!" and then march on, as though afraid that my attention might be distracted from himself. He hardly gave me the chance to say a word even to Gafia.

The cottage was as I remembered it—poor, but neat and clean, with whitewashed walls. The only ornaments were the brightly-patterned earthenware plates standing in a row on a dark oak shelf which Gorulya had made. Several photographs hung in the corner. One was of Gorulya himself in his gamekeeper's uniform, another was of Gafia, taken by a travelling photographer. It showed her standing by the cottage, with a frightened look on her face—tall, straight and stiff as a soldier at attention. There were other photographs familiar from childhood. My eye roved over them and was halted by a small picture cut out of a newspaper—a man with smiling eyes, a high, prominent forehead and a neatly-clipped, pointed beard.

Lenin! Yes, it was Lenin. I moved closer to take a better look at the features.

Gorulya noticed where I was looking.

"D'you know who that is, Ivanko?"

"I know. . . ."

"Lenin," said Gorulya, listened a moment and then repeated: "Lenin. . . . They say he was born on the Volga. . . . And now he's all over the world! . . . I'm for him now too, Ivanko, I'm a Communist. . . ."

"Don't they make it difficult for you here, *Vuiku*?" I asked cautiously after a short silence.

"It's awful," Gafia broke in. "They talk about the Party being legal, but they badger him something awful!"

"Be quiet!" Gorulya said sternly. "I've chosen my road and I'm not leaving it. . . . They had me up at the regional police headquarters, Ivanko. . . ."

A year previously, Gorulya told me, just as winter set in, a man had gone round the village, beating a drum

and shouting that all good people wanting work should go to Popsha's inn where they could be signed on.

The same thing happened in other villages too.

Work! Men were worn out and harassed by the search for it! They poured into Studenitsa and made their way to Popsha's. Gorulya was one of them.

The agent sat at a long table carefully writing something. The whole inn was crammed with people, crowding up and shouting:

"Put me down too. . . ."

Gorulya nudged his friend Skripka.

"Where's the job?"

"God knows," the other answered. "What's it matter so long as it's work?"

"Folks say they're building a big railway bridge near Rakhov," somebody remarked uncertainly.

"Aren't there any men to be had in the Hutsul country?" Gorulya asked loudly. "And that railway, I heard they'd got Czechs building it. They brought their own folks, families and all. . . ."

"Maybe they aren't enough, it's a big job. . . ."

It all seemed rather strange to Gorulya, but nevertheless his name was added to the others the agent put down.

The next day two hundred men received their fare, some putting a big cross on the receipt, others a thumbprint, and then set off. They were taken past a mountain village by the Tisza and put into an empty workers' barrack for the night. The recruiting agent checked them all with his list, then went off with the foremen to sleep in the village, promising to start the men working the next day.

It was very cold in the barrack. Fyodor Skripka lay down on the floor beside Gorulya, grunting, and thanking the Virgin for taking pity on him and sending him work.

Gorulya listened with half an ear, his thoughts on something else. He could not understand why they had skirted the village instead of going straight through it. Why had they been put into this deserted barrack, why was there barbed wire round it? Why had mounted patrols been stationed by the barrack since the agent and foremen left? All these things worried Gorulya. But he tried to stifle his uneasiness with the thought that two hundred men, including himself, had at last found work. Comforted by this, he was turning over to go to sleep when he saw a man in a high fur cap standing in the middle of the barrack. Gorulya stared. He knew all the men who had come with him, but this youthful, wind-roughened face he had never seen before. Gorulya was not the only one to notice the new-comer; from all corners eyes were fixed on him as he stood motionless, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his black jacket, as though he were rooted to the ground.

"Good evening, Comrades!"

The word "comrades" was so unusual in those days that the men were taken aback and they stumbled and stuttered back their "good evening." Gorulya rose and walked up to the stranger.

"Who are you?"

The man did not reply; he pushed Gorulya gently to one side to leave a clear view, took off his hat, revealing his fair hair, and said:

"I ask you to listen to what I have to say, Comrades."

"All right, why not? We'll hear you," said several voices, and Fyodor Skripka added:

"That is, if it's something good you've got to tell us! We've enough troubles of our own, we don't need to borrow more!"

"Quiet! Let him speak!"

"Thank you," said the stranger. "But I haven't anything good to tell you. Three weeks ago a welder was

crushed by a steel girder—Jan Vodička, a man with five children. The construction management was to blame."

"Eh, that's bad," Gorulya frowned. "What was he, a Czech, that Vodička?"

"Yes, a Czech from Moravia way. . . . And now five children are left with nobody to fend for them, five children of a working-man are orphans. But that's no concern of those gentlemen in the head office. Think they're going to worry their heads over a few orphans more or less? Not they! . . . Vodička's wife went to the manager for compensation. He refused to see her. The Czech workers sent a delegation and it was turned out. . . . So the Czech and Rakhov workers, your comrades, declared a strike; they have held out staunchly for a fortnight now."

"Stop, stop a bit, friend," Gorulya interrupted. "That means we've been brought here to work instead of them?"

"That's just what it is," said the stranger. "The management tried to get other workers from Rakhov way, but nobody went. So they went farther off and got you."

There was a commotion in the barrack. People jumped up.

"Don't listen to him!"

"Let him talk!"

"Got us here by a trick, the devils!" Gorulya swore. "And we couldn't guess. . . ."

"What trick?" cried Ivan Soima, a villager from Potoki with eight children. He advanced on Gorulya. "What trick?" he repeated, brandishing his fists. "It's nothing to do with us! We look after ourselves, and let the Czechs look after themselves. We've come here to work! It's none of our fault, all that, and we've got our own children to worry about! Isn't that right, you folks? If the Rakhov men join in with the Czechs, that's their affair."

"Shut your mouth!" Gorulya shouted.

"But maybe it's all just a tale, eh?" cried Skripka.

The men clutched eagerly at that straw.

"We've heard those tales before! Come and muddle you with talk, and before you've time to turn round, someone else has got the job."

"Who are you, tell us that?"

"One o' the gentry, maybe?"

"No, I'm a worker, a printer."

"What are you worrying about the Czechs for, then?" asked Fyodor Skripka spitefully.

"I'm a Communist," said the fair-haired man. "Our Party Committee sent me to you."

Quiet fell in the barrack. The men were taken aback. Gorulya looked with respect at the speaker as he continued: "Man eats man—that's the law of the gentry, the only one they recognize, the one they live by, and they think others live by, too. That was why the management felt safe in getting you here, they were sure you would go against the Czechs. But think a minute, Comrades—isn't the sweat of a Czech worker or farm-labourer the same as yours? Or maybe it tastes sweet instead of salt? . . . For men with calloused hands, whether they're Czechs, or Russines, or Hungarians, or Slovaks, there can be only one law—the law of comradeship! And the Communist Party appeals to you in the name of that comradeship—it is the strength of working people, and let the gentry feel it!"

"That's a true word of yours," said Gorulya.

"It's your truth, too." The stranger smiled, then looking from one to another, he asked: "What shall I tell the strikers?"

There was silence. Gorulya well knew the struggle going on in those men, he could feel something of it in himself. Suddenly he lost his temper.

"Say something, can't you?" he shouted. "Or do you want me to do your talking for you?"

"Go on, talk then," voices came dully from various places. "What you say—goes."

"I'll say it then!" Gorulya scowled. "We're not Judases. It's hard to go back home with empty hands... but there you are! We're not Judases. Tell 'em that!"

No one objected, nor did any one say a word to support him.

"Good!" said the stranger, wiped his forehead with his cap and sank down on the edge of a bench. He sat a moment, then rose wearily.

"Where are you going, in the middle of the night?" Gorulya asked with concern. "Bide here till morning."

"I can't."

"Well, then, we'll go a bit with you, or the patrol may stop you!"

"That's no good either. The patrol won't stop me, I didn't come in through the gate. A hole has been made in the wire..."

He went, leaving silence behind him. Then there was a sudden shout from the yard, the thud of running feet, another shout, farther away, and two shots.

"They've spied him!" Gorulya swore and was making for the door when it was flung open and one of the patrols burst in, bringing a cloud of frosty air.

"Who's been here?"

"Nobody!"

"God help you if you're lying!" and the patrolman shook his fist. That was too much for Gorulya.

"Keep your fists to yourself. We've got four hundred of our own.... Give you a knock that'll send you flying to the other end of the earth!"

The patrolman glared at Gorulya, spat and slammed the door behind him.

Nobody slept that night. When the foremen came in the morning to take them to the job, they followed them, avoiding one another's eyes, trying to persuade them-

selves that things might not be as their visitor of the night had said, hoping that the whole thing would pass over somehow.

Gorulya was in a turmoil. At times he had a wild desire to run forward and block the way of these silently tramping men, but instinct warned him that the time was not yet ripe. He must go along with them to the end, to that decisive moment which was bound to come.

The snow-covered road led to the Tisza and to the huge half-built bridge across it. There was frost in the air, and the spades and axes gleamed dully in the early sunshine.

On coming near the river, they saw men standing silent and motionless, in three rows, blocking their way. Gorulya pressed forward, his eyes ranged over the lines of men and found what they sought—last night's visitor was standing in the front row. His left sleeve hung empty and between the fastenings of his jacket there was the white gleam of a bandaged arm. So they had hit him. Gorulya grunted, disturbed. The man seemed to have become an old friend of his since the previous night. But his eyes roamed further and found something else besides the fair-haired visitor of the night before and the strikers.

"Children!" he said. "Look, there's children there!"

Everybody saw them now—five bundled-up little figures standing on the road in front of the adults. The men faltered and slowed down.

"Hey, what's the matter, get along there!" shouted an armed patrolman. "You needn't be scared, they won't touch you. The worse for them if they do! Get along now, keep moving!"

Spurred by the peremptory shout, the men quickened their pace, but soon stopped again. The lines of strikers no longer barred their way, they fell back on both sides, leaving on the road only the five little children of the dead welder Jan Vodička.

The children stood shy and uncertain in the strange surroundings; they looked at the crowd advancing along the road, then glanced for reassurance at the familiar figures standing by the side of the road. The smallest, a little fellow of about four, tried to break away and run to his mother who was near by, but the older ones held him back. And because it was so frightening, alone there in the middle of the road, they held hands for greater courage.

The decisive moment had come. In that instant, everything the visitor in the fur hat had told the men came back to their minds, everything that they had tried to stifle. And in some strange way it almost seemed as though nobody had come in the night, nobody had told them anything, that those words and thoughts were their own.

Gorulya read the decision in the eyes of the men around him, but somebody still had to make the first step. He pushed forward out of the crowd and strode firmly towards the bridge.

"Hey, back there!" shouted the patrolman.

Gorulya did not turn. He felt scores of eyes upon him. He went to the strikers, made a gesture of greeting, and turning, took his place in front of the children, as though to protect them. And immediately a score of men broke away from the crowd and walked past the mounted patrolmen. They were followed by more and yet more.

In vain did the patrolmen and foremen rush about, trying to hold the men back. The whole two hundred recruited in our district took their places side by side with the Czech and Hutsul strikers. The crowds merged. Fyodor Skripka found himself between two Czechs; grasping hands, they ranged themselves across the road. Others joined them. And Ivan Soima of Potoki, the man with the large family, pushed through to Gorulya, pulled at his sleeve and said: "Look how many there are of us!"

"That's the thing, friend," Gorulya rumbled. "Comradeship!"

The management had to give in. Compensation was paid to Vodička's widow and orphans, the builders went back to work and our men set off for home. They were in a black mood, cursing the firm, the management who had caused the death of a working-man, and all the other gentry with them, as well as the hard lot of unemployed men.

All the way from Rakhov, Gorulya sat beside his new acquaintance in a corner of the railway carriage. They talked long and earnestly, falling silent whenever anybody passed. When the train was drawing to Mukachevo and it was time to part, Gorulya said to the fair-haired man: "We've talked about everything, we think the same way about everything, we've agreed once and for all, and I haven't even asked your name."

"Olexa Kurtinets," said the other, smiling as he wrung the hand of the dumbfounded Gorulya.

* * *

"So there you are, Ivanko, that's how I met Mikhailo Kurtinets' son. Strange things happen, eh?"

Gorulya's tale had been so vivid and gripping that I could see everything as it had happened. I almost felt as though I too had been there, in that cold barrack, on the road by the bridge, and in the dim railway carriage.

"But why did the district police send for you, *Vuiku*?"

"After all that, they began getting nosy and ferretting out who this Ilko Gorulya was."

"They ferreted it out all right," Gafia threw in over her shoulder.

"Aye, that they did!" Gorulya laughed grimly and passed his hand over his face. "They wanted to scare me so I'd be looking for a mouse-hole to get into, I could

see that. But they'd got the wrong man! I'm not feared o' them now, I know all about 'em!... Well, they sent for me and started asking: 'Were you in the Russine Red Guard?' 'I fought in it,' I says, and back they come again: 'And in 'nineteen you signed the manifesto for uniting the Sub-Carpathian region to the Ukraine?' 'Yes,' I says, 'I signed it.' 'Why did you sign it?' 'Eh, Pan Officer,' I says, 'every man has a wish to be in his own home.' Well, I could see they didn't like that, their chairs started creaking. 'And what about now,' he asks, 'haven't you settled down yet?' 'And why should I?' I says. 'We sought a mother and they fobbed us off with a stepmother.' 'Are you a Communist?' he asks and I says: 'No, I'm not.' Well, they talked and talked and they saw they'd get nowhere with me. 'An ignorant lout,' they said, 'a Russine,' and they let me go. But I was a Communist the next week all right.... And that's the whole story, Ivanko."

I looked at Gorulya and hardly knew him, he was so changed. He seemed more frank and friendly, stronger, kindlier. It was not a weak or blind kindness, but the manly, courageous goodness of one who has found his road.

Gafia put a bowl of hot maize porridge on the table. I was hungry and ate it with zest, while Gorulya sat opposite questioning me about what I had been doing all the time.

"Let the lad eat in peace," Gafia interrupted. "He doesn't know what to do with his mouth—answer you or put something in it."

"All right, all right," said Gorulya apologetically, and asked no more.

When Gafia went out for milk, I asked Gorulya: "How about you, *Vuiku*, what's life like here?"

"We're alive," he drawled. "Half the village is on Matlakh's land now. Sang sweet like a nightingale, he

did, and then showed his teeth. He's a rich man, Matlakh is! Did you see the house he's built himself? No? Ah, you came in from the other end. It's just outside the village, that new house of his. I was in it once, I wouldn't have gone, but he sent for me. Well, I went along, and his wife comes and puts pork fat and plum brandy on the table. We talked a bit about this and that, Matlakh and I, and then he asks me: 'Why are you setting all the folk against me, neighbour?' And I told him: 'If you weren't a robber, neighbour, I wouldn't be doing it.' Well I thought he'd break out, but not he! Didn't bat an eyelid, didn't even go red, only shook his head. 'You shouldn't talk that way. It's all envy.' 'Nay,' I says, 'a man doesn't envy a wolf. You've sucked all your riches out of other folk's veins.' Anyone else would have started swearing by the Virgin and all the saints that he couldn't sleep nights, that he'd made all his money by the sweat of his brow and all the rest of it, but Matlakh, not he! 'Well, what of it?' is all he says. 'I'm not the first and I won't be the last.' 'You're not the first,' I says, 'that's true enough, but the last you may be.' We went on paying each other compliments that way a bit, then Matlakh, he says: 'What do you need for your farm, neighbour, I'll help you out.' 'Maybe you're thinking to help me the way you helped the other folks in the cruel year?' I asked. 'No,' says he, 'I'll really help you, but you must stop your talk about me.' 'So you think you can buy me, do you?' I asked. D'you think he blinked an eye? 'Yes,' he says. 'Everything in the world's bought and sold. The only thing is to know the price.' 'And God,' I says, 'what about Him?' 'Well, neighbour,' he says, 'if you come to that, even God looks to see who brings the thicker candle.' 'Aren't you afraid of sin, to talk that way?' 'Sin's not a millstone,' he says, 'it won't drag you down.' 'Aye, neighbour,' I says, 'sin's heavy for a poor man, but a rich man buys himself off. But you can't buy yourself off from me, so it's no good trying.'

"... No, he's not a human being at all, Matlakh isn't. And since his legs got ailin' he's grown wilder than ever. The men he picks, too, are as bad as himself. Now he's got a bastard, a sharper he was, they say, and Matlakh got him off from a prison sentence. He's holding on to him, he's his secretary like, a Pesigolovets that can use a pen, but there's not a foul deed he won't take on. He gets drunk at the inn one day and says: 'Be I the Lord I'd strangle all the people that don't count, just tighten a rope round their necks and finish them off!' And my, he's jealous, the devil. Himself the size of a mole and a mountain of jealousy in him. Jealous of everybody, of Matlakh, because he's rich, of Grandad Gritsan, because his sons esteem him, and of Mikhailo Solyak, because his daughter is Verkhovina's prettiest lass. He's even got grudgin' a kitten; he walks through the village, sees it frolickin' in the sun on the road and kills it because it's enjoyin' itself. He's just the creature for Matlakh. If there's dirty work Matlakh hasn't nerve to do, Szabo—that's the fellow's name—does it for him.... Matlakh's dug his claws into our life, Ivanko, and he's sucking our blood...."

"So that's Matlakh," I thought. "Came back from America with an empty knapsack—or so we thought—and now he owns half the village."

"*Vuiku*," I asked Gorulya, "hasn't anyone tried to stop Matlakh?"

"How are you going to stop him?"

"The authorities! Studenitsa's out of the way, a god-forsaken hole, and that's how Matlakh's been able to act the autocrat. Who'll see what he's doing out here?"

"They tried that," said Gorulya. "Went to the authorities in Svalyava, but they were told: 'In our republic there's complete freedom, a man gets on if he's able. And Matlakh,' they said, 'he hasn't killed anybody or

robbed on the high road, everything he does is within the law."

"But Svalyava's not the only place where there's authorities! There's Uzhgorod, and Prague, for that matter!"

"They're all tarred with the same brush." Gorulya made a gesture of hopelessness and changed the subject.

He was eager to get me up to the pastures.

"Can't you let him live under a roof for a bit?" Gafia expostulated.

"A roof!" snorted Gorulya. "It's dark under this roof! He's got to write an important book."

"And let him write it," said Gafia. "I'm not telling him to give up, am I? But it'll be better for him here. Up there you've no table, nor chairs, nor nothing."

"Well, I never!" Gorulya shrugged his shoulders. "I'll just load a table and chair on the nag, and up to the clouds we go!"

He actually did get a horse, loaded table and chair on its back, found an oil-lamp somewhere with a newspaper pasted over the broken glass, and off we went.

I gladly let Gorulya have his way, because I did not want to deprive him of the pleasure he evidently found in all the fuss of settling me in.

When we arrived, Gorulya turned three shepherds out of a small hut, placed the table under the smoke-hole and gave strict orders that I was not to be disturbed when I was working. The shepherds took these injunctions very seriously; they carefully avoided the hut, and if one of the dogs began to bark in the neighbourhood, they would threaten it with their fists and drive it away. Gorulya himself, however, could not resist the temptation to watch me at work. He would creep cautiously in, stand behind my chair, peer over my shoulder at the even, clearly-written lines and click his tongue in admiration.

"Eh, that looks grand, that's beautiful, Ivanko! Nay, I could never write like that!"

One evening Gorulya came when darkness had already fallen. A small fire was burning in the middle of the hut, its pale-grey smoke, like a slender tree with spreading crown, stretching upwards towards the starry sky clearly visible through the big smoke-hole. I was lying on a bed of springy pine twigs, resting after a long day's work.

"I've come to take my supper wi' you," said Gorulya. He went up to the fire, tipped a pile of potatoes out of his shirt into the glowing embers, squatted down, leisurely took from his pocket a piece of pork fat wrapped in a cloth, impaled it on a stick and settled down to wait till the potatoes baked. This was his favourite supper—baked potatoes flavoured by the fat dripping from pork over the fire.

The stillness of the night, the fire, a pleasant sense of fatigue and the knowledge that my work was almost done, put me in a mood for dreaming of the future. I felt a sudden urge to share my plans with Gorulya.

"You know, *Vuiku*," I said, "I am nearly through with my work."

"No, really?" he said in wonder.

Lying there on the soft pine branches, I began to tell him what was in my memorandum.

I painted a glowing picture of how the fields of Verkhovina could look. I could see them before me shimmering in the sun with the perennial grasses that would give new life and strength to the soil. Before my eyes the tousle-headed oats, the only crop which would at present ripen on that soil, made way for fat ears of wheat rippling in the breeze.

Gorulya listened with earnest attention.

"Wait a minute, Ivanko!" he interrupted. "What about cattle? You must write about the cattle too. Maybe the

day'll come when there'll be the kind of cattle in Verkhovina that they've got in Switzerland, or even better, eh? There won't be enough tubs for the milk. But wait a minute—it won't be just milk—butter, Ivanko, butter! Folks'll be saying: 'That's grand butter, fresh and sweet—where's it from? From Verkhovina?...' 'Why, where else, neighbour? You should see the cattle they've got up there!...' Then with a sudden change of tone he mumbled: "Of course it's your own affair, Ivanko, you needn't write it if you don't want to. I don't know where I get all these ideas, like a child, I am."

"No, *Vuiku*," I said, "I'll write about cattle too."

"Well, that's good," Gorulya said smiling. "Good to have 'em somewhere, even if it's only on paper."

When I got to the end of all I had to tell, Gorulya sat staring into the fire in silence.

"*Vuiku!*" I said impatiently. "Why don't you say something?"

Gorulya roused himself.

"It all sounds grand, Ivanko," he said. "Clear the juniper out of the pastures and the couch-grass off the fields. But—what about Matlakh?"

"Clear Matlakh out of Verkhovina too," I answered.

Gorulya looked at me.

"And who'll do that?"

"Whoever the government sends to put things right in Verkhovina."

"The government.... That's the Governor, eh?"

"I don't know, maybe," I said.

"H'm," Gorulya grunted. "Well, sit down and get your supper. The potatoes are nearly burned to ashes, with listening to you."

Gorulya ate hurriedly; he was sombre and silent, and left me earlier than usual.

I felt upset all through supper, and thoroughly depressed after Gorulya left. I tried working, but could

write nothing. I lay down to sleep, but sleep would not come.

Late at night, soft footsteps approached the hut and halted by the door. Somebody had stopped there, fearing to waken me. I felt that it must be Gorulya and I called his name. He replied with a cough and entered.

"Can't sleep, eh?" he asked, sitting down beside me on the pile of pine branches and hay that served me for a bed.

"No."

"I guessed as much; and the night is long yet."

He said nothing more for a few moments, then turned and touched me on the shoulder, asking: "Are you really thinking of going to the Governor wi' those notes of yours?"

I rose on my elbow.

"Yes, *Vuiku*. Why do you ask?"

"Because I've been thinking about it all this time," said Gorulya tonelessly. "You won't get anywhere with that lot."

"Who do you mean 'that lot'?"

"Well, those gentry," said Gorulya. "What do they want with a well-fed Verkhovina? Well, the Governor, say—what good is it to him?"

"The Governor's not Matlakh!"

"It's all the same." Gorulya waved away my objection. "There's only one difference—Matlakh eats pork with his fingers and the Governor uses a fork. Now just tell me, will a well-fed Verkhovina give them anything more than they get now? What they want out of us is cheap hands and timber, Ivanko. Verkhovina's like a well to them—they dip out of it with a bucket, but they don't put a mugful in. . . . Well, they'll read those notes of yours, and then they'll say: 'What will it profit us? Ilko Gorulya and Fyodor Skripka will benefit, eh? Don't they wish they may get it!' And that'll be the end of it."

"It won't! I'll push it through!"

"They'll just lead you a dance and they'll laugh at you."

"Why? Because I don't want Verkhovina to go hungry?"

"That's just what'll make 'em laugh."

I rose quickly, I felt my temper mounting.

"You always paint everything black," I said. "It's only gentry and paupers with you. You forget *people*—ordinary, honest people who want to do the right thing."

"There's Matlakhs and there's Gorulyas," said he grimly. "And there are ordinary, honest people who are fighters for justice, and they are on the side of the Gorulyas. . . . Think about it, Ivanko, think it over, what I say."

That talk left a shadow between us. On the surface everything was still the same, but neither of us felt as free and easy with the other as before, and that depressed me. Work went badly, too. I disliked what I was doing, and felt irritable and bad-tempered.

All this time the weather was wonderful; the sky was a deep cloudless blue and not a breath of air stirred the grass on the pastures. The distant green mountains basked in the sunshine in majestic calm.

Leaving my work to look after itself, I spent my days from early morning till late at night wandering aimlessly about with Gorulya's gun, which I never used, on my shoulder.

One day Gorulya said he was going down to the village and asked if I would like to keep him company. I had no particular desire to go, but I decided to walk with him through the woods.

We crossed the pastures by the usual path, but when we came to the edge of the woods, Gorulya turned left and led me along a new path.

"Notice the path so you can use it coming back," he said as we entered the thick forest. "It's a short cut."

Sometimes we came to deep gullies washed out by mountain streams, bridged by an unsteady log.

The woods stretched for a long distance, and when we emerged, the sloping fields and lower pasture lay before us.

"Well, here we are, Ivanko," said Gorulya, turning. "Maybe you'll change your mind and come along? What d'you say? It's not so far to the village now."

I was about to agree when I chanced to see a tall rock among low bushes on my right. It looked very odd and lonely standing there in the middle of the meadow, as though somebody had pushed a finger up through the ground.

"What's that?" I asked, nodding towards the rock.

"Don't you know it?" Gorulya said and laughed. "Have you forgotten the Yellow Rock?"

"The Yellow Rock?!"

I seemed to smell again the sweet fragrance of herbs. The Yellow Rock! How could I have failed to recognize it? It was simply that I had never seen it from that side before.

"I always thought it was much higher, *Vuiku*," I said to excuse my forgetfulness.

"There's a lot of things look big when you're small yourself," Gorulya replied with a nod. "Well, what about it, Ivanko?"

"I think I'll just stroll around a bit," I said.

"As you like," said Gorulya, adding sadly: "Take your strolls while you can."

I waited until Gorulya had disappeared down the steep slope, then turned towards the meadow and made my way to the Yellow Rock.

There it stood, seamed with cracks and brownish-green lines. The wind had carried seed on to its blunt head and a small sapling had grown there, slender, weak

and bent; it looked as though it had somehow clambered up there and was trying to find a way down. At the foot of the rock, grass pushed up to the light through the junipers. I bent down to look at it and noticed a tiny withered flower, the size of a match-head. It must have bloomed in the early spring. Was that what Olenka had brought me, wrapped in a piece of homespun? Distant, forgotten memories came alive again—my childhood, the talk about my trip to Volovets, and the white cloth with the magic herbs to guard me against all evil.

Olenka herself seemed to stand before me. I had wanted to go and see her when I arrived, but she was working on a farm-stead far away.

I knew that Olenka, a widow with a boy to bring up, was very badly off, that she lived in a tumble-down, deserted hut by the mill, and that she worked for anybody who would hire her.

"Maybe she's at home now?"

I did not return to the path but made my way down to the village as the crow flies, pushing through the bushes as I had done in childhood days.

An hour later I reached Olenka's hut by the mill. It stood on piles close to the water, squat under its moss-grown roof. When the river was in spate it overflowed the yard and ran right underneath.

I knocked on the door. No answer. I knocked again, harder, more insistently. Again no answer. Then I pushed the door open and entered.

I stopped, blinded for a moment by the change from the daylight outside to the gloom of the hut. Its only light came from a tiny window about the size of my two palms. No sunshine could ever come through it, and even the daylight that managed to penetrate seemed faint and wavering.

As my eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, I distinguished a table, a bench and by the wall a

broad shelf, evidently serving as a bed, made not of planks, but of thick straight poles trimmed with an axe.

"Anybody home?" I asked.

"Y-eh," came an ancient, cracked voice.

I peered through the gloom and saw in the corner a little old woman, lean and bony, with a thin but very expressive face. She was sitting on the home-made pallet with her legs tucked under her and smoking one of those long-stemmed clay pipes which old women often smoke in Verkhovina.

A child of about four or five lay beside her wrapped in sacking, breathing heavily and unevenly.

I greeted the old woman, who replied with a nod and eyed me closely.

"Who d'you want?" she asked at last.

"Olena," I said hastily. "Does she live here?"

"Where else could she live?" the old woman wheezed, emitting a cloud of tobacco-smoke. "She lives here. And what d'you want with her?"

"I just wanted to see her," I said. "I haven't seen her for a long time. I'm from Studenitsa myself."

"From Studenitsa, are you?" The old woman livened up and removed the pipe from her mouth. "I ought to know you—all the lads and lasses in Studenitsa were in my hands soon's they saw the light. Whose lad might you be?"

I gave my name and the old woman smiled.

"Maria's lad? I mind you, I mind you well. Born w'out a voice, you were, but I slapped you well—and you yelled the roof off." She looked me up and down, from head to foot, and continued: "And now it's a real gentleman we've grown to be. . . Well, Olena's not home. She went to Matlakh to ask for a bit o' bread for the lad here. The lad's sick, you see, he lay in a swoon all the time and we thought he was gone, but we pulled him

round again and he started asking for a bit o' bread and there wasn't any. . . . Maybe Matlakh'll take pity on her and give her some."

"Why, of course, he will! Olena's worked for him since she was a child!"

"Aye, she worked, she did! Tended the pigs and worked in the field, but when she got sick, and the lad too, then it was 'get out!'"

The child moaned and stirred restlessly. The old woman bent over him, her lips moving soundlessly.

I had known poverty all my life, but such terrible destitution as this I had never seen.

I waited for a long time, but Olena did not come.

Telling the old woman that I would be back later, I went quickly home to get a few crowns from my slender savings and buy some food for Olena and the boy. Gorulya's cottage was quite close by.

"So here you are after all," said Gorulya in surprise. "Didn't want to come when I said, and now turned up all on your own! . . . But what's up? You're looking black as thunder!"

I was about to explain why I had come when the sound of shouting reached us from the village road winding down the hill—a sustained roar of many voices merging into a prolonged "A-a-a-a-ah!" that was full of chilling menace.

"What's that?" I asked, straining my ears.

"God knows," said Gorulya, putting his milk-tub down on the floor. "Maybe the lads are playing at war?"

We went to the window and saw the people running out of the next-door cottage to listen.

The street was as yet empty, but the howling, whistling roar was coming nearer.

"They're hunting somebody," said Gorulya and paled. Perhaps the times when he himself had been hunted by the Count's keepers came back to his mind.

We went out to the gate.

Suddenly a woman appeared round the bend, running as fast as she could towards the mill. She crossed a small bridge, stumbled and fell, but got up at once and ran on, just as a crowd of her pursuers poured out from behind the trees overhanging the street. A man of medium height, his city clothes singling him out from the rest, was running in front, brandishing a stick. He paused for a moment and with the awkwardness of a weakling hurled it at the woman. It whistled low over the ground like a spear but missed her. Shouts of anger filled the air and the woman sped faster than ever, but it was clear that her strength was giving out and she would soon collapse.

The road was too far away from the gate for us to see the face of the hunted woman, but a terrible intuition told me who it was.

"*Vuikul*!" I shouted, although Gorulya was beside me. "That's Olena Shtefaki!"

Leaping over the fence, I half ran, half slid down the slope to the road, Gorulya following me, churning up the rubble on the hill-side and sending stones flying in all directions.

For a little while some cottages standing below Gorulya's hid the village road from us, but we could hear the roar approaching, mingled with the whistling of the air in our ears.

As we rounded one of the cottages, we saw Gafia running up to meet us. Her black shawl had slipped back off her head and her face was distorted with horror. Seeing us she stopped, her hands pressed to her heart.

"Oh, Mother of God!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Matlakh's men'll kill her, they'll kill her!..."

"Who?" shouted Gorulya without stopping.

"Olena Shtefaki!" Gafia gasped as she turned and ran down with us.

"Why are they hounding her?"

"She went to ask for a bit o' bread for the lad, he's ill," Gafia panted. "They didn't give it her. . . . Then she saw them tipping crusts and bits into the pig-trough and crept up and grabbed a bit! Szabo, Matlakh's man, saw her and along with young Matlakh and the hired men made after her. . . . He'll kill her, Szabo will!"

I do not even remember how we came to be near the road. I had time only to see the woman's face, the face of a stranger, worn and haggard, expressing neither fear nor despair, and over her shoulder the savage faces of Matlakh's five thugs whom he had hired in out-of-the-way Hutsul villages.

"Knock her down!" shouted one of them in a frenzy, and lunged forward at her.

Before I had time to grasp anything, the crowd of villagers came and thick hot dust rolled over the road, concealing everything.

We thrust right into the thick of the crowd.

"What are you doing, folks!" I heard Gorulya's voice. "Get back, get back I tell you!" A volley of curses followed.

Nobody paid any attention.

"Hurry, Ivan!" shouted Gorulya. "They'll kill Olena!"

He swung and gave one of the young thugs a blow that sent him flying to one side with a yell.

I was beside Gorulya, hewing a way through to Olena with fists and elbows.

Somebody struck me in the face. I felt a sharp pain in my jaw and staggered, but regained my balance and answered the blow. A hot wave of anger rose in me. I hit out right and left, sparing nobody. The hired men staggered, shaking themselves as though trying to regain their senses and turning a dull, blank, unwinking stare now on Gorulya, now on me.

I was making my way to a hatchet-faced, grey-haired, puny creature wearing a bow-tie. I knew him at once for

Szabo, Matlakh's secretary. He had kept in back all the time, shielded by the hired thugs. I saw him fluttering his arms and ejaculating frenziedly.

I did not succeed in getting at him. In an instant I had lost sight of the man; and though my eyes kept roving everywhere there was no sign of him; it was as though the earth had opened up and swallowed Szabo.

The knot of people thinned out, fell silent and retreated, forming a semicircle round Olena. She lay prone, face downwards in the dust. Her clothing was torn, one arm protected her head, and the other, lying on the road, still clutched a crust of bread.

I bent over her and spoke her name. She groaned and raised her head with difficulty. Our eyes met. In hers there was only weariness, but by those eyes, and those eyes alone, I recognized in this care-worn young woman ground down by want Matlakh's little nurse, my first childhood love—Olenka.

"Ivanko," she whispered faintly through cracked lips. "You?"

"It's me, Olenka, you know me?"

"Yes. . . . Eh, but it's long since I saw you! . . . They beat me, Ivanko, they beat me. . . ." And she cried weakly.

Gafia came up with two other women. I helped them raise Olenka and they half led, half carried her away.

"And you!" Gorulya glared at the hired men. "Who d'you think you were beating up? One that's just like you are. . . . It's like beating yourselves."

"What's that to us?" one of the men tried to justify himself as he wiped the blood from his face. "We do what we're told. . . ."

He looked at the others for support but found none.

"Why didn't you stop 'em?" Gorulya turned to the villagers angrily. "Scared of Matlakh?"

"That's the way it is," said Fyodor Skripka. "If you touch Matlakh, God help you!"

People began to disperse, avoiding each other's eyes.

Late that night Gorulya and I returned to the pasture. My jaw was swollen and aching. Sleep was impossible. No sooner did I close my eyes than I saw Olena's outstretched hand clutching the crust of bread.

I rose, lighted a candle and crossing out the title "A Memorandum on Grasses" on the first page of my work, changed it to: "A Memorandum on Verkhovina."

From that night, the terrible picture I had seen never left me. I went down to visit Olena several times and helped her as much as I could. She lay in her cottage by the mill, dull, motionless, indifferent to everything, her brown, gnarled hands lying over the blanket. I looked at them and I thought of my mother's hands, of Gafia's. I thought of all that those hands had done, of all the soil they had tilled, the wonderful embroidery they had stitched, the goodness and the wealth that came from them for others' enjoyment; surely, I felt, the whole world is sustained by those tireless hands of gold!

When Olena turned her face to me, her beautiful eyes no longer held grief, but the painful, tormenting question of a human being driven to the last extremity of despair.

"Why, Ivanko? Why is it like this? Only tell me, what have I done to bring the anger of the Mother of God upon me? I'm never idle an hour, when can I even think of sin? . . . When will there be an end o' this life? When will it end, Ivanko?"

Olena's breathing became difficult and she fell silent. A hard lump rose in my throat. I gritted my teeth and looked silently at Olena's thick, knotted fingers.

I was rewriting my notes from the beginning, in a style very different from the one I had planned. Instead of a dispassionate scientific treatise, they became a description of the sufferings of Verkhovina. I did not confine myself to grasses, but wrote about Semyon Rushchak, Olena, and Matlakh, who had laid his yoke upon Studen-

itsa. I gave statistics, travelling over the mountain districts to collect the figures of shackling debts and the annually mounting death-rate caused by malnutrition and starvation.

I was certain that the authorities in Prague and Uzhgorod knew nothing of the real situation in Verkhovina, that local officials holding soft jobs concealed it from them. I felt I must open their eyes as quickly as possible.

16

About a hundred and fifty paces from the camp the shepherds had driven piles firmly into the ground and set up a kind of roof on them. Apart from the dark huts, this was the only shady spot in the whole place.

We made ourselves comfortable on a heap of fragrant hay brought by Gorulya: a Communist deputy to the Czechoslovak parliament and I. My new acquaintance—coatless, hatless, in a short-sleeved shirt open at the neck—was half sitting, half lying, supported on his elbow; he was holding the pages of my memorandum.

Although I knew that it was not upon this man that the fate of my work and plans depended, I was restless and nervous. I turned over and lay prone, trying to compose myself by listening to the chuckle of a near-by spring. But at even intervals the sound was broken by the rustle of turning pages.

Early that morning I had been awakened by animated talk; a laugh rang out—unfamiliar, but so infectious that, drowsy as I was, it brought an answering smile to my lips.

I peered through a crack between the boards of the hut and saw Gorulya standing not far away with several other men in whom I recognized some of our village people and wood-cutters from a clearing near the pasture.

Only one man was a stranger to me. He wore a khaki jacket, a narrow-brimmed hat pushed to the back of his head and heavy mountain boots; he was resting his weight on a crooked birch stick and wiping his moustache with a handkerchief as he spoke animatedly to the men about him.

"So that's how it is," I heard his rich, expressive voice. "Ever since they closed down our paper, those sleuths watch my house day and night."

"May the devil fly away wi' them!" said Gorulya and spat.

"What's to be done?" the visitor said and laughed. "I've learned how to shake them off when I need to. But this time it was not so easy. 'I've been assigned to you, sir, to protect your safety,' he said. It took me all day to get rid of him."

"You should ha' brought him up here with you," said a young wood-cutter regretfully. "We'd ha' trimmed him into match-sticks."

The visitor looked at the young fellow and smiled.

"Spare your strength, Yurko," he said. "There's still thickets to be hewed down, without wasting time trimming match-sticks." Then turning to Gorulya, he asked: "The folks have all left, then?"

"Aye, they've gone," Gorulya nodded. "But it makes no odds—I can have 'em all back again by evening."

He began at once giving quiet instructions to various men. They listened carefully, said briefly: "Right!" and went away quickly without stopping to take leave.

By this time I had guessed that this man with the fair moustache was Olexa Kurtinets, the son of the dead teacher Mikhailo Kurtinets.

I already knew something of the man from what I heard Gorulya and Gafia tell. Later, I learned much more from Kurtinets himself.

After the death of his father, Olexa and his mother moved to the Hutsul area, far from our own region—to a place called Veliki Bychkov. They went there to live among the workers of a chemical mill and among woodcutters, who had known Olexa's father when he was a mechanic at the mill and later leader of the Russine Red Guard, and who now cherished his memory dearly. Her deceased husband's friends—those who had remained alive—as well as total strangers, helped Maria Kurtinets to settle in the new place. What greatly impressed seven-year-old Olexa at the time was that the people were not helping them out of charity. They never called him "poor orphan." They did not bemoan his mother's lot of a widow. Even the women did not do it. This was not at all like the folk at the village near Mukachevo.

Here they came and said: "We've brought fire-wood. Good woman, tell us where to pile it up." Or: "Take a measure of maize. You'll return it some day."

At times, without saying anything at all, there would be someone climbing the roof to patch up a hole with new shingle or lay a fresh chimney in place of the old, tottering one.

To the boy, used to commiserating sighs and moans, the new people seemed rather cold-hearted, not at all as kind as his mother made them out to be.

One day, on the bank of the Tisza, along which Olexa was fond of roaming and watching the raftsmen skilfully manoeuvre their rafts down the rapids, Olexa caught sight of a foal struggling in the tangle of a thicket. He could not tell whether the village boys or fear had driven it there. The foal was down to its last strength; its hopped mother pranced near by, powerless to help her young.

Olexa felt such compassion for both the mare and the foal that his eyes filled with tears.

"Is it yours?" he heard a voice behind him. Olexa turned and saw a strong, well-built man in wet clothes, with an axe over his shoulder.

"No, not mine," replied Olexa, recognizing the man as one of the raftsmen who had put new shingle on their roof.

"Then why cry?" asked the raftsman.

"I'm sorry for it."

The raftsman smiled.

"That means you're kind-hearted."

"Suppose so," Olexa drawled.

"No, brother, that's not being kind-hearted," the raftsman said sternly, and ordered: "Get the mare out of the way, take the axe and cut at the thicket."

Olexa obeyed. He drove the mare on to a side, took the raftsman's axe and swung at the thicket. It was no easy job; the twigs were tough and springy; the foal snorted and strained.

"That's it, that's it," the raftsman, without stirring a step, kept saying as he watched Olexa.

At last the thicket was thinned and the colt broke loose, darting away to its mother as fast as it could.

"Now you've been kind," the raftsman spoke, taking back the axe from Olexa. "'Pity shows tears, kindness—calluses!' That's what your Dad used to say to us, laddie." And flinging the axe across his shoulder, the raftsman repaired to the settlement.

Olexa remembered these words of his father's for the rest of his life.

Friends helped Maria Kurtinets to get a dish-washer's job at the mill. Olexa soon began attending an apprentice school.

He had grown up sick and weakly.

"He won't last long," the neighbours said of him.

Olexa, however, kept on living in defiance of everything; he lived and in him lived the thought of his killed

father. At first it was not clear to him why other dead people were soon forgotten, while his father's name was not only on his own and his mother's lips, but constantly on the lips of strangers as well. What he knew of his father no longer satisfied him. He longed to learn why he had been killed and why people cherished his memory so dearly.

"That people may live happily on earth," they told him, "that there be no untruths, no injustice, no evil. That is why they destroyed him and that is why his memory is so dear to the people."

And along with a burning hatred for those who had slain his father there grew in Olexa a fervent longing to be like him. Who knows, perhaps it was this longing that kept aglow the flame of life in his feeble frame.

When Olexa was fifteen, he suddenly announced that he was going to float rafts down the mountain river Tereblya.

"The lad's out of his wits!" the neighbours said. "God knows what thread holds his body and soul together, and he wants to be a raftsman!"

His mother urged him to seek work within his strength.

"D'you know what floating rafts is like?" she would say scoldingly. "Our rivers here won't give a chance to a weak boy like you."

Olexa knew it all well enough. He knew there was no trade in the Carpathians so hard and dangerous as floating rafts down the swift mountain rivers with their many rapids, he knew how much daring, strength and endurance it demanded. But daring, strength and endurance were the qualities Olexa felt he needed to become the man his father had been, and the boy had it firmly fixed in his mind that floating rafts would toughen his feeble body and build up his courage.

Nothing could shake him—neither the arguments of his mother, nor the taunts of the hiring office. The man-

ager laughed, the raftsmen held their sides. And Olexa was taken on as a good joke, just to see how quickly this puny, big-eyed runt would make off when he found what the job was like.

Olexa, however, stuck it out. He helped to lash the rafts, carried beams and learned to handle the *tsapina*—a long pole with a sharp hook used for easing timber down into the water. There were times when Olexa himself felt that the work was too much for him, that if he fell he would never rise again, but when some kindly raftsmen came to his aid, his eyes flashed with such anger through their tears that the man regretted his good-hearted impulse.

"What, hasn't that little runt made off yet?" the manager asked the raftsmen.

"No," they answered sheepishly. "He's sticking it!"

Time passed, and Olexa himself as well as the people around him could see the growing strength of his arms and the sparkle coming into his eyes. When he at last began floating rafts on his own down the treacherous Tereblya, the older men, who had laughed at him that first day, followed him with their eyes and said:

"Good luck to the lad!"

Olexa Kurtinets got his education where and how he could. He read much and studied at night. He continued working on the river until the firm discovered that the moving spirit in a strike of raftsmen had been none other than Olexa Kurtinets; then they sacked him.

With the help of friends, he found work in the Solotvino salt mines, and a little later became an apprentice type-setter at the printing-office which put out the Communist newspaper.

Now he was one of the most active workers in the Party. He was editor of the Party newspaper, and the mountain district had elected him to the Czechoslovak parliament.

Gorulya's deep respect for this man infected me, and I was filled with excitement at the prospect of meeting him.

The group gathered by the hut dispersed, leaving Gorulya and Kurtinets alone.

"We didn't know what to think yesterday," I heard Gorulya say. "We waited and waited, just as we'd settled it, and no sign of you!"

"I had to leave the passenger train at Svalyava and get on a goods train from there," said Kurtinets. "They might have sent another man to tail me on the way."

Gorulya frowned.

"It's getting difficult."

"Yes, it's not easy," Kurtinets said. "And it's likely to get worse. We've got to expect it. They may try to get the Party banned."

"Let them try!"

"They'll try, all right. After all, it's we Communists who are leading the movement for friendship and alliance with the Soviet Union, and that's an idea that sticks in the throats of Hitler and his supporters here in Czechoslovakia, and maybe others too, farther off—in America, in England—maybe, did I say?—it's certain! It was those so-called democrats overseas who made Hitler what he is. That's how it works!"

"Devil fly away with 'em!" Gorulya swore. "On paper we're legal, but we have to meet in secret, on the high pastures!"

Kurtinets smiled.

"That doesn't matter! We're not giving up, that's the main thing. Only we must see to it, Gorulya, that every village hears what we have to say. That's one of the things we've got to discuss with our comrades this evening."

"They'll be here, Olexa," said Gorulya soothingly. "You don't need to worry—they'll come!"

Silence fell. It was still that early morning hour when the sun has not yet risen, but the air is filled with clear, calm light. The shadows and mists of night had fallen away down the slopes and now seemed to linger, girdling the uplands and the edges of the woods, so that the pasture-land with its hollows and steep hillocks was like some strange island floating in infinite space. It was the hour when the heavenly beauty of the Carpathian uplands makes the heart stand still in awe and wonder.

"How vast and free it all is!" said Kurtinets after a long silence. "And how lovely! I could look at it forever!"

"Verkhovina, our mother," sighed Gorulya. "With such beauty she deserves happiness."

"She will have it," said Kurtinets. "Be sure she will." Softly but very clearly, he began to sing:

*Verkhovina, our land so dear,
How beautiful is all I see!
The streamlet ripples cold and clear,
Gay and sparkling, proud and free.*

He seemed to be musing rather than singing as he stood leaning on his stick. I had the feeling that his thoughts ranged far beyond the bounds of the song. And without myself noticing it I caught up the melody with the second verse:

*Through all our wooded mountain land,
From hill to hill, from grove to grove,
With leather belt, with axe in hand,
A carefree woodman's lad I rove.*

The song ended as easily and naturally as it had begun. Kurtinets was silent for a moment, then turned to Gorulya.

"What d'you say, Ilko, if I get the wife and kids and come up here to you, say for three or four days—have a bit of a holiday, tramp the hills and do some trout-fishing in the streams? Eh?"

"And glad to have you. But it's not for a holiday you'll be coming," said Gorulya seriously.

"No, not for a holiday," Kurtinets agreed with a sigh.

I made his acquaintance half an hour later. Kurtinets and Gorulya had seated themselves on the edge of a chute hewn from a tree-trunk to channel the water of the spring, and were engrossed in talk. I did not want to interrupt them, but Kurtinets saw me, rose and took a few steps in my direction. Without jacket and hat he looked taller than he actually was, and his whole appearance—the face with its cleft chin and particularly the sparkling grey eyes—conveyed an impression of indefatigable kindly strength. Actually there was nothing in his face or figure that resembled his father, yet an indefinite something strongly reminded me of the Bystroye schoolmaster, and I told him so.

"You remember my father?" he asked, surprised and pleased, like a man who suddenly discovered a link with something dear to him.

"Yes," I said, "I remember your father, although I saw him only a few times—on the porch of the Bystroye school, when Mother wanted me to go there, then at the beginning of the war, and when he returned from Russia, and..."

"I remember that too, though rather vaguely," said Kurtinets regretfully. "And the last time?"

I hesitated.

"At the mill, I suppose?" Kurtinets asked.

"Yes, at the mill," I nodded.

We sat down. The water murmured as it flowed down the chute. Kurtinets took out his handkerchief and sat in

silence for some time, deep in thought. Then—as though shaking off painful memories—he turned to me.

"I've heard a lot about you from Gorulya. About you, and about your work."

"It's finished," I answered, with that pleasant feeling one has in speaking of a job done.

"Finished, is it? Congratulations!" said Kurtinets heartily. "I'd very much like to read it, if I may."

"Why, of course," I replied.

Pages rustled as Kurtinets placed them neatly one upon the other. They already made quite a pile, although much still remained unread.

Gorulya came and sat down some distance from us, leaning against the pole supporting the shelter. I looked at him out of the corner of my eye. His face was grave and composed, but he kept stealing glances, now at Kurtinets, now at me, and to occupy the time began twisting into a thread strands of sheep's wool which had caught on the pole.

The patches of sunshine falling on the floor through cracks in the roof changed their shape, they lengthened and some disappeared altogether. Midday was approaching. . . . At last Kurtinets came to the last page. Another minute, two, three. . . . He slowly closed the folder, rose, but said nothing.

I waited. Gorulya stopped twisting his thread.

"It's good, what you've written, Pan Belinets," said Kurtinets, breaking the silence, and he screwed up his eyes. "It's excellent, in fact, and what's most important—it's the truth about Verkhovina, what it's like, and how splendid it could be. I can see it becoming even more splendid than you've ever dreamed of."

He lighted a cigarette, and little puffs of smoke curled out from under his moustache.

"But don't nurse any hopes that the authorities in

this region will welcome it. At the best, they'll pigeon-hole your notes and hope they'll be forgotten."

"And at the worst?"

"They'll be up in arms, and stop at nothing."

"Why, you're even more of a Jeremiah than Gorulya," I said with a laugh.

Gorulya rose and his face darkened.

"Don't fool around, Ivanko."

I flared up.

"*Vuiku*, I'm not a child now, remember!"

"Grey hairs can be foolish, too," Gorulya caught me up. "When folks learn you sense—listen to them!"

The hot colour flooded my face, and it cost me great effort to bite back a sharp retort.

Kurtinets took no notice of our brief clash.

"Think for yourself," he continued, just as though he had not been interrupted. "How else can these men regard your project, if it threatens the very foundation of their existence? Your scientific plans with their system of grass and crop rotation would mean knocking down all fences and wiping out all boundaries."

"Stop a minute!" I broke in. "There isn't a word in my notes about constructive measures. I only write about what can be done and why, but as for ways and means, that must be settled by those who take my notes as a scientific basis. Joint efforts will find a way."

"You're wrong, you yourself indicate those constructive measures here, in your notes. I can list them for you. To carry out a new land reform—the old one only fettered our Verkhovina people; in other words, to liquidate the Latoritsa firm and sell its estates to landless villagers on the basis of long-term government credits. To set up co-operatives to work the land jointly. To open experimental seed-farms run by the state. You haven't put all that down, of course, but it's what you were thinking of."



"Well, yes, something of the kind," I admitted.

"But what else is that but knocking down fences and wiping out boundaries!" Kurtinets cried. "That's the only way to give science a free hand, Pan Belinets. . . . But who's going to do that? Our government? Don't deceive yourself. Don't be taken in by eloquent speeches at charity balls at the 'Corona.' They're nothing but smooth words, just another speech written by the secretary and pulled out when needed—the same speech for every occasion."

"The people need you, need your knowledge, and we for our part will assist you in your noble initiative. . . ." I recalled the Governor's words. He had spoken with such respect about science! Could that have been just another speech? Impossible! Politics blinded people, and they were blinding Gorulya and Kurtinets.

Kurtinets walked to the edge of the shelter and flung away his half-smoked cigarette. Something was seething within him and he needed time to master himself. When he finally turned back to me, his tone was softer and more even.

"I can quite understand that it's not easy for you, Pan Belinets. Both in school and at college no small efforts were made to keep the truth from you and befog your brain with talk about all our vaunted democratic liberties. The truth's sometimes hard to hear, but you must know it."

"And what is that truth?" I asked abruptly, and rose.

"It's what Gorulya and I have already told you," Kurtinets answered. "And more than that—your idea can be carried out only when things here, in our mountains, are the same as over there," he looked to the east, "in the Soviet Union. It is for this future that we are fighting. And you must fight for it, too."

He bent down, picked up the folder with my notes and looked at me.

"I can get your notes printed, if you wish. . . . It'll be a bit difficult, of course, our paper's banned and our print-shop's closed, but we'll find some way to publish your work. . . . Up to now Verkhovina has only been pitied for its barren soil, its crop failures. Nobody has ever yet told our Verkhovina folk what possibilities this land has, how abundantly it could bring forth, and that's very important, so that people should look ahead. Let them read your pamphlet and know that it is not the soil that is to blame, not the soil that is barren—let them know that the barrenness lies in the oppressive system under which they live, a system which can give them nothing but misery, no matter what democratic coat it wears. . . . Well, when a man finds his coat too tight for him, he doesn't try to make himself smaller, he starts thinking about getting a new one."

"Thank you, Pan Kurtinets," I said. "But I cannot accept your offer. I did not write this memorandum to have it published as a pamphlet, or serve the political purposes of any party, even such a one as yours."

"Who d'you think you're talking to?!" Gorulya burst out angrily. "Keep a civil tongue!"

"Wait a bit, Gorulya," Kurtinets smiled. "It's true that he's not a child any longer." He turned to me and very seriously asked: "So you stand aloof from politics?"

"Yes."

"That's a pity. To ignore politics is in itself a certain kind of politics—and very bad it is, too."

* * *

Semyon Rushchak was waiting for me with his cart under the trees on the village road down below, to take me to Volovets where I was to catch the Uzhgorod train.

The silence in the cottage was heavily charged. I finished packing. Gafia was standing beside me upset and grieved over my departure and my quarrel with Gorulya.

Gorulya himself sat smoking his pipe at the far end of the bench by the window, his back to me. He had followed me down from the pasture, shouted something at Gafia, slumped heavily on the bench by the window and had been sitting there in silence for over half an hour.

Everything was packed. I snapped the lock of my suit-case, and the click seemed to add weight to my depression.

Gorulya turned his head. His eyes were almost hidden under his frowning brows.

"You've decided, then?" he asked.

"Yes, I've decided," I said firmly, meeting his look with difficulty.

"So that's it," said Gorulya. "Folks show you the road, and you turn your back on it?"

"Everybody has his own road, *Vuiku*."

"Take it, then!" Gorulya cried angrily, and with a quick, convulsive movement rose from the bench.

"Ilko! What are you doing?" cried Gafia, clasping her hands. "When lads go out into the world folks send them off with words o' good cheer at parting. What are you doing? D'you want the lad to forget the road back here?"

"He won't forget it," said Gorulya hoarsely. "He'll come back!... If there's conscience in him, he'll come!"

Only Gafia went down with me to the road. I got into the cart. The small, sturdy Hutsul horse started off with encouraging shouts from Semyon. The wheels rattled over the stones. Gafia walked beside me, her hand on the side of the cart, whispering: "The Mother of God give you happiness, *Ivanko*."

Gafia stopped at the edge of the village. Semyon jumped up on the cart, and the horse, feeling the reins, moved faster.

I looked back for a long time—until the bend of the road concealed Gafia.

When we had travelled some distance from Studenitsa, I tore a leaf from my note-book, wrote my address on it and held it out to Rushchak.

"This'll always find me, Semyon. Write and let me know how they get on at home, how Gorulya is... Everything."

"All right," said Semyon, folded the paper and put it carefully in the pocket of his homespun jacket.

17

Uzhgorod met me with the quiet of an early summer morning. The town was just awakening. Housewives were drawing the linen curtains aside, flinging windows wide open and piling pillows, blankets and feather-beds on the sills to air. Long-horned, phlegmatic oxen were lazily pulling the first carts to market down long Mukachevskaya Street. Here and there metal shutters clanged as they were raised over shop windows. The barbers were hanging out their signs—copper soap-dishes.

Beggars took their stand at the corners. Gipsy musicians, with faces pale and weary from a sleepless night, emerged from cafés and restaurants and made their way slowly home to Radvanka. A policeman stood on guard by a barrier to see that nobody entered the town barefoot. This regulation was enforced through Czechoslovakia's shoe king Băt'a. "Nobody must be barefoot in my country!" he proclaimed, and his advertisements stretched across all the barriers: "Cheap! Elegant! Good Wear!"

I turned off Mukachevskaya Street and came to a bridge over the River Uzh. After rains this river flowed swift and muddy, but now it was shallow and clear, its unruffled surface reflecting the pruned trees and the houses lining the avenue. Fishermen, trousers rolled over

their knees, were sitting on tall collapsible stools, made of boards, in the middle of the river, and were patiently awaiting a bite.

Despite the early hour, dozens of men in shabby but well-pressed suits stood on the bridge and along the embankment, resting their elbows on the rail, moodily watching the fishermen. The day had started, but these men had nowhere to go and nothing to do, they were weary with enforced idleness and the fruitless search for work.

I took a room in a cheap hotel and set off without losing time to seek my school-friend Vasil Chonka, who now resided in Uzhgorod. Chonka had wanted to go to college, but his father, who owned a small workshop making fancy furniture, had been ruined by cutthroat competition, and had decided to resurrect his "firm," as he called it, at his son's expense.

When Vasil finished school, his father took him to Uzhgorod and, with the assistance of relations, married him off to a plain, high-strung girl, the eldest daughter of a certain Lembei, who had formerly been in charge of a nobleman's vineyards.

The dowry of several thousand crowns revived the shoddy furniture "firm," but not for long. Vasil Chonka found a position in a bank and took to drink. On the rare occasions when old friends came to see him, he would wink and confide in a whisper: "They sold me. . . ."

The Lembeis lived in an inconvenient old house. Everything about it breathed a spirit of prim respectability. Heavy antlers hung on the walls of the entry and dining-room, alternating with yellowed oleographs of ancient Austrian castles. The furniture, cumbersome and worm-eaten, looked as though each piece had stood for countless years in the exact spot where it had first been set down.

Lembeï himself, a tall, corpulent old man, had once been famous as a leading wine specialist in the valley by the Tisza; but when the vineyards of the Count he served were sold to a company, he left them and since then had done only occasional work for small wine-growers. The savings which he had collected in forty years' service to the Count melted swiftly, and had it not been for his son-in-law's salary, he would have been hard put to it to make ends meet.

Lembeï, nevertheless, looked upon himself as the autocratic head of the house and insisted on a strict observance of the old manner of life established under the Emperor Franz Joseph. He glorified the past. He was a servant abandoned by his master but unwilling to face the fact.

My meeting with Chonka was gay and hearty. Vasil dragged me off to meet his wife, "the old man," as he called his father-in-law, his wife's sister and the children, of whom he already had two. However, as we entered the dining-room where the family was drinking their morning coffee, Vasil seemed to shrink, to become somehow smaller and quieter, and I felt an almost tangible atmosphere of boredom and pretence.

The cordiality with which Chonka's wife, Julia, invited me to table was affected; the old man wore an imposing air, but several times I caught his calculating glance trained on me; even the children seemed to behave with a studied politeness.

Later I learned all that lay beneath the surface—the irritation, the petty envy, the penny-pinching, the back-biting—things which had to be concealed, but without which life could not go on in this house.

The only member of the family who acted naturally and who I felt was repelled by the hypocrisy of the others was Lembeï's younger daughter Ruzhana. She alone was quite at ease and unaffected. I would not have called

her pretty, but there was something very vital and attractive about her brown eyes, her softly rounded face, carelessly arranged auburn hair and pleasant voice.

Unlike her elder sister, Ruzhana was not affected in manner. In defiance of the conventional atmosphere which reigned in her home she spoke what she thought and did as she pleased. Yet I felt that there was something in the inner depths of her being of which she herself was perhaps unaware but which disturbed her peace—a latent, frustrated force, yearning for expression.

Ruzhana asked about the years which Chonka and I had spent in school together. I answered her readily, and, as I recalled one amusing incident after another, Chonka, too, became more animated. Ruzhana laughed gaily, ignoring the sour looks of her sister and father.

In the middle of breakfast, the door was flung noisily open and a tall, lean priest in a silk soutane entered the room.

"Spiritual Father, this is an honour!" boomed Lembei, rising heavily and advancing to meet him.

Everybody rose. The visitor pattered a blessing, quickly crossed himself and then replied to the greetings.

There was a general fuss of seating him at the table. Julia and Ruzhana poured out his coffee and handed him sugar and milk, asking respectfully: "What will you take with your coffee, Spiritual Father?"

While the women were busy at the table, I had a good look at the Spiritual Father. His small, clean-shaven face was covered with tiny wrinkles which moved like ripples on water with every word he spoke. His sunken eyes were dull and lifeless. But, nevertheless, the Spiritual Father was not as old as might have appeared at first glance.

"I fear that I have interrupted your conversation," he said, not addressing anyone in particular.

"It was only of worldly vanities," old Lembei said hastily.

"Worldly vanities are also sent to man from on high—to try him," the Father said with a sigh.

"They were talking of their school days, Spiritual Father," said Ruzhana, and blushed.

The priest sipped his coffee, and looked at me and then at Chonka penetratingly.

"Youth sins through ignorance," he pronounced, and all the wrinkles on his face stirred. "It strives to know the unknowable, to shatter the unshatterable, and oft seeks the truth not in faith and humility, but in Promethean arrogance."

"How true, how true," Lembei chimed in.

"But this spiritual turmoil," the priest continued, "is nothing more than the search for peace, as a man before sinking into slumber tosses and turns on his couch, seeking the most comfortable position for his body. And, as the years pass, by the will of the Almighty the bold pride of youth disappears."

"But what if it doesn't disappear?" I asked, and immediately regretted it.

Old Lembei frowned and went purple. Chonka and Ruzhana gave me a scared look as though I had been guilty of a piece of unparalleled audacity, and all waited with trepidation for the Spiritual Father's reply.

The old man pushed aside his cup.

"Then God's wrath falls upon the shepherd who failed to preserve one of his flock. The shepherd's eye must be unsleeping!" he proclaimed solemnly, casting up his own eyes.

Ruzhana glanced at me again, not in apprehension this time, but as though expecting me to admire the humility of the Spiritual Father who so submissively took upon his own pastoral shoulders the divine wrath against the wandering sheep.

To me, however, the old man's words conveyed not meekness and humility, but the whistle of the switch which the Almighty had placed in his pastoral hands.

I waited for the priest to continue, but he turned to old Lembei and said that he had come upon church business.

I had not the slightest idea then that this very priest had back in our school days tried through Lukanich to mould our ways of thinking.

After breakfast Chonka went to the bank. I took leave of the family and accompanied him.

As soon as we were in the street, Chonka asked: "How d'you like Father Novak?"

After a moment's hesitation, I decided to be frank with Chonka.

"He's not as meek as he pretends to be."

"That's what I think, too," Chonka agreed, casting a glance around. "There are such, you know, with a double bottom to them."

"You're a bit afraid of him, aren't you?" I asked in my turn.

Chonka sighed.

"When he comes along, I feel like a sinner on a frying-pan. We're his parishioners, and he's taken it into his head to pay weekly calls on all the people of the parish; the way an executor goes for taxes, he goes for our souls." Chonka lowered his voice to a whisper and added: "I think he knows all there is to know about everybody in the parish. And they go running to him on every matter."

"Who's 'they'?"

"Julia and Ruzhana. Their best counsellor and comforter! They won't stir a step without him."

"Ruzhana?" I repeated the name, disturbed by vague feelings of jealousy and regret. I did not as yet form a definite opinion of the priest, but it was somehow unpleas-

ant for me to learn that Ruzhana, like Julia, was one of his devout parishioners.

"They won't stir a step without him," Chonka repeated.

"You don't like it?"

"Nothing much about it to like. I don't mind telling you—I'm scared of priests. Though for that matter a life like ours in this house is enough to drive anyone to priests or to the devil—or to the pub, which is where I go." He laughed, but the laugh had a very bitter ring. "Oh, to hell with them, tell me about yourself!"

As we walked towards the bank, I told Chonka my plans for the future. He listened rather indifferently, and merely said that the memorandum would have to be bound and presented personally to the Governor. He promised, however, to arrange through a secretary he knew for me to see the Governor.

"I'll be expecting you this evening," said Chonka as we parted.

When I went back in the evening to the Lembeis' house, I was carrying the green folder with my manuscript.

"Oho!" cried Chonka, looking through it. "Seventy pages! Somewhat long. . . . Well, that doesn't matter. I've fixed everything up, I spoke to Pan Badovsky about you, he promised to give the memorandum to the Governor personally. And he'll let you know when the Governor will receive you."

I rejoiced at the news, and felt very grateful to Chonka for the trouble he had taken. I heard women's voices coming from the dining-room and expected him to invite me in again, but instead he dragged me off to an isolated wing and hastily, as though fearing that somebody might disturb us, poured me out a glass of wine. It was mellow and fragrant, and I sipped it slowly; Chonka himself drained glass after glass, his eyes gradually

becoming moist, wandering and vague like those of a new-born babe. Suddenly he winked at me, shot a glance at the door and whispered:

"They sold me. . . ."

I realized that drinking for him had become a habit, and not merely a means to dull his disgust with life.

A whole week passed before I saw the Governor. I was on thorns, could neither work nor sleep, and when I visited Chonka I stopped as late as I could, to kill time somehow.

Thursday finally came, the great day. Filled with hope, I stood before an old-style building on a rise in the centre of the town, with two gravelled drives leading up to its vaulted gates. Under the gable of its steep tiled roof was a balcony with a tall flagstaff.

I mounted to the first floor and entered an ante-room. A secretary made me repeat my name twice and then went in to announce me. A few minutes later he reappeared through the white door, left it ajar, and announced:

"Pan Agronomist Belinets."

A few paces, and I found myself in a spacious, high-ceilinged room. The Governor was not at his desk, but sitting at a round table by the window turning over sheets of paper. I saw that my green folder lay before him.

I bowed. The Governor nodded in reply and invited me with a gesture to be seated. I sat down, my eyes fixed on his face; but try as I would I could read neither approval nor disapproval, his features were expressionless, smooth and blank as a locked door.

"He doesn't remember me," I thought, and decided to remind him of Brno.

"Yes, yes, that's right, I remember," said the Governor, nodding. "So you've graduated, have you?"

He picked up the green folder, opened it at random and pretended to be immersed in reading. His eyes, how-

ever, were fixed on one spot and I realized that he was simply considering what he would say to me.

"Well," he said at last, and shut the folder. "We are all deeply concerned about the backwardness of Verkhovina, and everything possible is being done . . . everything possible. . . . The government of the republic places no restrictions upon emigration, as was the case under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In the United States, Canada, other countries, too, the door is wide open for our fellow-countrymen. In my opinion, emigration is the only radical solution to the problem of Verkhovina. You are an educated man, Pan Agronomist," he continued, leaning back and clasping his hairy fingers on his chest, "and you will agree with me that our Verkhovina people are extraordinarily conservative and stubborn. They go to other countries and may work there for years, but instead of taking out naturalization papers, they keep hankering to return. I have even heard of men who came back to the Carpathians so as to be buried in Rostoka or Paseka, instead of in Nebraska or California. Can you imagine anything more stupid in our day?"

"I think it's quite natural," I said. "After all—it's love of one's own country! . . ."

"Love of country?" said the Governor in some surprise. "No—it's nothing but crack-brained obstinacy!"

With a great effort I kept my temper.

"Now, with regard to your memorandum, Pan Agronomist," said the Governor after a pause. "I think that instead of coming to me, you should put the matter to each farmer individually. The land belongs to them, not to the state. They are free to do with it as they please. We have no right to intrude in that holy of holies."

"But, sir!" I cried. "This isn't a matter of the welfare of just one man, but of thousands!"

"Quite so! Bring your project to the attention of private enterprise, the farmers who are directly interested,

go to our agrarian officials—for instance, you could go to the Regional Agricultural Department, to Deputy Leshchetsky, he understands the needs of the village population. . . . Yes, that's the man for you, Leshchetsky, Leshchetsky. . . ."

He spoke the concluding words in a quick patter, holding the green folder out to me, and I realized that in his eyes I was nothing but an importunate visitor to be got rid of as quickly as possible.

What could I do? I took the folder, rose, bowed mechanically and walked blindly out of the study.

This was the first blow. It left me staggered and confused.

Near the Governor's residence on the hill was a public garden with a fountain. I found a secluded bench and sat down to collect my thoughts. Gorulya and Kurtinets came to my mind—I seemed to see them again as they had stood on the pasture. A vague feeling of uneasiness stirred in me, but I drove it away, telling myself that after all nothing so very dreadful had happened. I had simply come to the wrong person. "It's impossible that the men in charge of our region can be indifferent to what happens in Verkhovina," I thought. And the more I tried to convince myself of this, the greater became my determination to push my project through at all costs. I made up my mind to waste no time but to go the very next day to Leshchetsky, at the Agricultural Department.

18

On my arrival at the department, I was informed that Leshchetsky had gone out to dinner. The secretary, an elderly man, told me that the deputy would be there later, but if my business was urgent, I could find him in the restaurant where he always dined,

I jotted down the address and went to look for the restaurant.

I discovered it on the left bank of the Uzh, in a row of shops—a dimly-lighted place with a few tables. Its owner, a plump woman with a handsome, impudent face, sat behind the bar.

"You want Pan Leshchetsky?" she asked, and, climbing down from her high stool, led me through a door behind the bar into a small parlour looking out into the yard. It was dark here as in the first room, but some engravings hung on the walls, there were starched white cloths on the two tables and a plush-covered sofa stood by the window. It was evidently a private room for select customers.

The sole occupant was a man with thin, colourless hair smoothed back from a parting, a puffy face and pale eyes, who sat hunched over a plate, eating, or rather devouring, a roast chicken. He tore the flesh from the bones with his teeth as greedily as though he had eaten nothing for days.

"Ah, it's you, Maria," he said, winking at the woman (later I learned that she was his mistress), but seeing me behind her, he put the gnawed chicken leg back on his plate and straightened up.

"You wish to see me?" he asked importantly.

"If you are Pan Deputy Leshchetsky...."

"Yes, I'm Leshchetsky."

I introduced myself and sat down.

Leshchetsky eyed me and my green folder for a few seconds, and I had the distinct feeling that he had been warned I was coming. I felt anxious and uneasy, and asked nervously: "Has anybody spoken to you about me, Pan Leshchetsky?"

His eyes roved but then became fixed and dull.

"No, nobody," he said hastily. "Nobody's said anything.... What can I do for you?"

I explained the reason for my visit.

"I see, I see," Leshchetsky mumbled vaguely as I finished.

He took the folder and, balancing it upon his hand as though testing its weight, announced: "I won't read it, you tell me yourself what's in it."

This was unexpected and embarrassing, yet I could do nothing but comply. I began weakly, haltingly, but as I continued I warmed up to my subject, so that Leshchetsky eyed me with curiosity. It was only when I came to the villagers' debts and the Latoritsa firm that a shade of disapproval crossed his face.

I came to the end. The deputy bit his lip, picked up his fork and began tracing designs on the table-cloth with its handle.

"Are you working anywhere?" he asked without raising his eyes.

"No, not yet. I've only just completed the course at Brno."

"Then we'll have to find a good position for you. . . ." He dropped the fork. "Well—so now, thank God, we've lived to see our own people becoming agronomists, and going to parliament. . . ."

"Thank you, sir," I said. "But it's not about a position for myself that I've come to you."

"Of course, I understand that," Leshchetsky caught me up quickly. He picked up his fork and resumed his drawing. "Verkhovinal. . . It does you credit, great credit, that you feel so deeply for it. I remember how I used to plough my father's bit of land there, and herd the cattle, and now by the people's wish I am a member of parliament. . . . And I can tell you frankly, Pan Agronomist, Verkhovina is constantly in our thoughts."

"It seems to me, sir, that the time has come not only to keep it in our thoughts, but to *do* something about it."

"You mean, to do what you have written here?" Leshchetsky asked quickly, tapping my green folder with his fork.

"Yes."

"No, Pan Belinets," Leshchetsky said with a crooked smile. "Here you throw mud at the Latoritsa firm and all the good farmers into the bargain, and it's only they who keep things going. If it weren't for them, Verkhovina would be done for. It's they who provide work for the people."

"And the shackling debts, the waste-land—do those exist only in my mind?"

"I don't know what's in your mind," said Leshchetsky coldly. "But if we listened to you and did as you wish, then your science would never reach a single farm. I know the villager better than you do. You can pour gold over him, he'll never agree to destroy his boundary-line. If he could afford it, he'd build a stone wall along it, and a high one."

"But that comes from fear, fear of losing the little he has."

"No, it's individualism, Pan Belinets. 'This is mine! Here I'm the master!' That 'mine' is older than God."

"So it's your opinion that the villagers don't need science?"

"I didn't say that," the deputy answered evasively. "They need science, but the kind suitable to their farms."

I could see that Leshchetsky was tired of the argument. His eyes were dull, his face had a gorged look. A glance was enough to show that here, too, my cause was lost.

"What do you advise me to do then?" I asked dully.

"Find yourself a position, Pan Belinets," he said pacifically. "I can recommend you as steward on one of the estates near Pryashev. A good position. And as for this," he glanced at the folder and there was a note of

warning in his voice, "the best thing you can do is to put it away, show it to nobody, and forget about it. I'm giving you sound advice...."

Perhaps I owe Leshchetsky a debt of gratitude for his words, because they transformed my despair into such fury, such contempt and loathing that later, when I suffered one set-back after another, it spurred me on, and prevented me from giving in.

In the evening I went to Chonka again.

"Leshchetsky!" he growled. "What else could you expect from him! Your idea's right against his interests, Ivan. In another three or four years he'll be one of the richest men in our parts. Leshchetsky, indeed—that's a good joke!"

Chonka then proceeded to acquaint me with this man's history. Leshchetsky's father had been a wealthy farmer, and the boy had managed to get some sort of education. Ambitious, crafty, with a slick tongue, he decided to try his luck in politics. A few speeches during May Day demonstrations and a bit of activity in organizing peasant conferences in Mukachevo gave him a certain prestige in Verkhovina and the reputation of being "on the left." He made the rounds of the villages, people listened to him, and his popularity grew rapidly. A man like that, trusted by the villagers, was just what the Agrarian party needed, so they bought him for a good round sum. Leshchetsky joined the Agrarian party, then in office, and soon got into parliament. He came to parliament in a peasant outfit specially made for the occasion, a homespun embroidered shirt and a green hat with a tuft of bristles in the band. Pictures of this "emissary of the Russine peasants" appeared not only in Czechoslovak magazines but overseas as well. Leshchetsky was soon put in charge of the Agricultural Department, and there his special swindler's talents had full play. His standing and his wide contacts in the villages provided excellent

opportunities for a most profitable racket. Knowing well that many peasants had not the means to buy a calf or sucking-pig to raise, he would offer to go shares with them, giving them money for the purchase. The peasants would then feed and tend the animals for a set period, sell them and hand over half the money. This kind of business, which put Leshchetsky to little trouble, drew him quite an income. Usually, however, the peasant was unable to feed the animal for the period stipulated; he would then go to Leshchetsky in Uzhgorod—not to the department, of course, but to the small restaurant, and the following conversation would take place in the back room.

"Pan Leshchetsky," the peasant would say, shifting from foot to foot, "I've nothing left to feed the children, and the pig's got big now, it's very big, Pan Leshchetsky, maybe we could sell it?"

"How's that?" Leshchetsky would shrug his shoulders. "No, I can't do that, it wouldn't pay me."

"How wouldn't it pay you?" the peasant would protest uneasily. "You gave a hundred crowns for it and you'll get six hundred back."

"No, neighbour," Leshchetsky said firmly. "Feed it up a bit longer. You'll get more for it yourself too."

"But I've naught to feed the children," the villager pleaded.

"You should have thought of that before."

"Earlier on I thought I could do it, but God thought different."

"I can't agree, all the same," said Leshchetsky. "Go on feeding it up till the time we set."

"Don't say that, sir. I ask you humbly to make it easy for me. . . . I'll take a smaller share."

"All the same I'll lose by it."

After a long haggling the peasant would agree to take a quarter of his share, and Leshchetsky would sigh heavily.

"Well, have it your own way, I'm not a wolf, I'm a man myself, I can see that it's hard for you and hard for your little ones. Let my money go!... Go along to Pani Maria, neighbour, and settle the price since we're going to sell."

Pani Maria, Leshchetsky's right hand in his business deals, looked after all the rest.

People said that several thousand oxen and pigs were being raised in this way in the villages for the deputy.

He was greedy and close-fisted to the extreme. He did not scorn the smallest gains. When parliament was in session, the state paid every deputy twenty-five crowns a day for hotel expenses, but Leshchetsky found a way of keeping this in his pocket. As deputy to the Czechoslovak parliament, he was entitled to free fare on all railways in the republic. Thus in the evening, after the session, he took a sleeping-berth in a train going to the frontier and went to bed. At two in the morning, awakened by the conductor, he reached the frontier station where a train back to Prague was usually standing. He would change to this and go to sleep again, arriving in Prague in time for the parliament's morning session.

"I tell you, he's got it behind the ears!" Chonka clicked his tongue. "He's a big shot, Leshchetsky is!"

"Well, the sun doesn't rise and set with Leshchetsky. I shan't give in."

"Of course you won't!" Chonka caught me up. "You mustn't. You show 'em—Leshchetsky and all the rest of 'em. Give 'em a wipe in the eye!"

Like all weak-willed people, Chonka applauded resolution in others, as though this made it to some small extent his own.

"But where'll you go now?"

"To the newspapers, to the senators, to the President himself.... I've got to act!"

That was the beginning of a harassing time. I tried everything, I wrote to members of parliament, to senators, to the Ministry, and then waited for answers in alternating hope and despair.

I was using Chonka's address.

"A letter for you!" he would cry almost before I entered the gate, waving the envelope triumphantly over his head as though it contained the answer to all my hopes. With a pounding heart I would rip it open.

"Careful, careful," Chonka would say. "You'll tear the letter! Give it me, your hands are trembling."

The replies, however, were all the same—politely formal. Some merely said that the matter did not come within the competence of the office or official in question, others acknowledged the undoubted value of my memorandum and advised me to apply to the Regional Agricultural Department (to Leshchetsky!), while others, again, said that my proposals flew in the face of common sense and all the laws of Nature.

More and more frequently, when I was alone, my thoughts began to go back to Gorulya. With amazing clarity I heard again everything which he and Kurtinets had said, every word. I tried to drive the memory away, but I was like a man trying to blow out a raging fire, who blows with all his might, but the flames only flare up more brightly.

Raging at my helplessness, I would fling myself on my bed, gritting my teeth and recalling for the hundredth time the bitter truths which Kurtinets and Gorulya had told me; but with obstinacy born of pride and shame I desisted from following them to their conclusion.

Haggard and resentful, refusing to give up, I kept seeking people who I thought might sympathize with my ideas. My hopes had already lost their rainbow hues,

they had shrunk and shrivelled until all I dared to think of was some lucky chance; a slender hope indeed, but I clutched at it.

My money was running out, I would have to leave the hotel and look for some kind of job. Work in my own line I could get only through the Agricultural Department, but the very thought of applying to Pan Leshchetsky turned my stomach.

Chonka proposed that I move over to his wing of the Lembei house. There was no alternative and I accepted his offer. That evening I packed my suit-case. It was a Sunday and Chonka, warning me that everybody would be away at church, gave me the keys.

The evening was cold and rainy, more like autumn than summer, with a chilly wind blowing from the river. The streets seemed empty, and the dreary loneliness was in tune with my feelings.

When I entered the garden, I was surprised to see a light burning in the room which was to be mine, and a shadow passing to and fro behind the drawn curtains. I opened the door slightly and saw Ruzhana so absorbed in moving a small table that she never even noticed my presence.

I knocked. Ruzhana started, turned, and looked embarrassed.

"What a good thing you've come, Pan Belinets," she said as nonchalantly as she could. "I can't make up my mind where to put this table."

"Don't bother about it," I said smiling. "Put it anywhere."

"How can I put it just anywhere?" she objected. "It ought to stand in the most suitable place. Of course it won't do here . . . suppose we put it by the window. . . . Would you mind helping me?"

"Gladly," I answered readily.

"Take off your hat and coat," said Ruzhana. "The hanger's over there, behind the door."

Without waiting for me to obey, she picked up a curtain from the sofa and held it against the window. Her small strong hands did everything quickly, and every move I made to help was just a second too late. Before my eyes the room took on the air of cosiness that a woman's touch gives to even a very drab place.

I was warmed by the pains she had taken; the downcast mood in which I had arrived out of the rain and wind left me for the moment, and I felt an unaccustomed sense of ease and quietness. The one thing that disturbed me, however, was the knowledge that in a short while Ruzhana would take her leave and I would remain alone to brood over my thoughts. More than anything else I now feared solitude. And, deep in my heart, I now knew that there was but one person in whose company I could find peace. That person was Ruzhana, Ruzhana whom I knew so little as yet. Neither Chonka, nor Gorulya, were he to appear suddenly, could relieve me. Therefore, when Ruzhana, giving the room a last look, remarked, "Well that's about all," I said hastily, heedless of all proprieties: "Please stay for a while longer; I feel the need for your presence."

The carefree, hardly perceptible smile that had lingered on Ruzhana's face, faded. Her countenance grew grave and the glance she gave me was frank and direct. There was not a shade of reproach in it, no censure in her serious eyes, nothing but sympathy and even a flutter of alarm.

"It is late, Pan Belinets," she said undecidedly, without averting her eyes, and slowly sank on to the edge of the arm-chair.

For a long time we sat facing each other, not exchanging a word, the silence broken only by the beat of the raindrops on the window-panes.

"Has anything happened, Pan Belinets?" Ruzhana asked suddenly.

The question caught me unawares.

"No, nothing special," I answered quickly. "Everything is the same . . . but, I forget, you don't know what that 'everything' is."

"I do know," Ruzhana put in firmly. "Vasil told me."

"Does he tell you everything?"

"Not always, at any rate, not when it's something that concerns him personally."

"Perhaps you judge him severely."

"Not at all, I forgive people their weaknesses, except for one. . . ."

"And what is that?" I wanted to know, pleased that the conversation was being diverted from the original topic which I hoped to avoid, if only for a short while. "I, too, may find it useful to know what this weakness is."

I smiled but Ruzhana did not smile back.

"I would never, never," Ruzhana began gravely, "be bound for life to a man I did not love, no matter what I would have to suffer in consequence of it. And this is what I cannot forgive Vasil."

"But Julia is your own sister! . . ."

"Does it change matters?"

"It doesn't," I could not but agree. "It doesn't. But, unfortunately, Vasil is not the only one. . . ."

"And you, Pan Belinets, could you do a thing like that?"

"No!"

At first I felt perturbed and even somewhat alarmed at such plain-spokenness and candour on Ruzhana's part, but soon I knew them for their true worth, realizing that I meant to Ruzhana what she now meant to me. We were not unlike travellers on a long journey, little acquainted, yet with full trust confiding to each other our innermost

thoughts, thoughts which one is sometimes even loth to share with one's near ones.

"Tell me something, Ruzhana," I begged.

She flung out her arms. "What can I tell you? I know so little, and what I do know is so, so sad. . . ."

"Something about your childhood days."

"I don't remember having had any."

"But that's impossible," I protested, "even I've had them."

"You may have, but I didn't. I did not know the fearful want you knew, but as soon as I began to understand life a little, I realized that a noble and kind being, the dearest being in the world to me, my own mother, was suffering and pining away right before my eyes because she could not resign herself to life with a man she never loved. She was too straightforward and sincere to be able to conceal her true feelings and Father was too much of a despot to let her free. . . . They never loved each other, money had bound them together just as it bound Vasil and Julia. I try so hard to remember at least one peaceful day in my childhood, but in vain. Good God, why am I telling you all this? I don't know myself. . . . Twice Mother tried to run away, taking me with her and leaving Julia to Father, but we were brought back home by force. One of the times we had got as far as Trieste, where lived the man my mother truly loved. But Father got us back by court. . . . And then . . . a little bottle of morphine ended it all. . . . Now, tell me, Pan Belinets, can I speak of having had a childhood like other children."

I did not answer. Nor did Ruzhana expect an answer from me. She rose quickly and made haste to leave.

"Goodness, it's so late! . . . Father and Julia will be back any minute now."

"Why didn't you go with them?" I asked, rising too.

"Somebody's had to arrange things for you here." Her glance passed over the room.

"I'm sorry to have given you so much trouble."

"Are you in the habit of speaking falsely?" Ruzhana asked and smiled.

I felt embarrassed.

"No, never."

"This time you did speak falsely, didn't you? Why did you do it? Why do people say they're sorry, when they're not sorry at all. You don't mean to tell me you weren't pleased by the pains I took?"

"I certainly was pleased!" I replied. "But . . . I . . . I said that because it's the proper thing to say."

"Too bad," Ruzhana said sighing, "too bad that we think that proper. How I wish I knew somebody who was not afraid to speak the truth at all times."

"Why can't you be that somebody?"

Ruzhana repressed a smile.

"I? I'm too weak for that, Pan Belinets. As it is, Father and Julia call me a madcap and say that I'll come to no good. . . . Well, you'd better rest now, good night."

Before I had time to answer, she had gone out with a friendly nod.

I looked after her, listened to her quick steps as she went from the wing to the main building. At last a door banged; all was quiet again and I thought how empty and sad this strange room seemed, now that she was gone.

The talk with Ruzhana did not bring me the peace of mind I longed for. But it revealed to me a sad side of her life of which I had had no inkling.

I paced from corner to corner once or twice, then switched out the light and lay down on the sofa. With the darkness, however, my agitation and distress returned. Ruzhana's grief became blended with my own misery and bitterness as though they were links of one and the same

chain. And now when my thoughts turned to the memorandum and the wretched experiences I had had on account of it, I felt a fierce resentment.

"Can it be possible that of all the senators and public men not a single one is really interested in the fate of our peasants?" I thought. "Can they all be so indifferent to the poverty in Verkhovina? And those are the men who talk so nobly about the people, who claim to be serving the people!"

I was choking with anger. I rose and switched on the light, but it brought me no peace. For a long time I sat by the table sunk in gloomy thoughts. As I brooded, an idea came to me and hardened into a resolve. I would write an article, I would pour out everything seething within me. Perhaps that might arouse men's conscience, make them think, get public support for my memorandum.

I spent the whole night writing. I spared no one—neither Leshchetsky, nor those who claimed that my ideas were against the laws of Nature. If it was to be war—then war to the knife!

It was already morning when I finished. Through the window I could see the rain steadily falling and the trees swaying before the gusts of an east wind.

20

Before leaving for the bank, Chonka looked in to see how I was fixed up. Early as it was, he was already slightly tipsy.

"I never dreamed that this hen-house could look so nice," he cried, glancing round the room from the doorway. "Did Ruzhana do all this? She's not losing her heart to you, by any chance, is she?"

I flushed and frowned.

"Don't talk nonsense!"

"Keep cool, I was only joking," Chonka laughed. "She's always kind to everybody. To be honest, of all the persons in this house, myself included, she's the only one I respect. She doesn't have an easy time of it here, Ivan, what with the old man's petty tyranny, all the hysterics and the stupid gossip and scandal-mongering, ugh! Of course it's tough for her, say what you like. It's tough for me too, but I'm a man. Five or six glasses and what do I care! I know she doesn't think very much of me, but I fancy she's a bit sorry for me."

For a moment Chonka stood in gloomy thought.

"Listen, Vasil," I said, to change the subject. "I've written an article."

"What kind of an article?"

"Here it is. Sit down and I'll read it to you."

I made Chonka sit down in the arm-chair, collected my sheets of paper from the table and began to read.

For a few minutes he listened quietly, then a frightened look came into his eyes. He fidgeted uneasily and a couple of times tried to interrupt, but I stopped him with a gesture.

"You're crazy, Ivan!" cried Chonka when I finished. "There'll be a hell of a row!"

"All the better," I said firmly.

"No, no," Chonka shook his head. "It's impossible. . . ."

"I don't want to know whether it's possible or not," I interrupted. "Just tell me one thing—do you like it?"

"It's a bomb-shell!" cried Chonka with sudden animation. "I'd like to see Leshchetsky's face! . . . It's a grand article! We'll have to get it printed no matter what happens."

The words came tumbling over each other, and although still apprehensive, he was clearly elated at the thought of the excitement which might enliven—if only for a short time—the dull monotony of his existence.

We began considering where we should send the article.

Chonka snapped his fingers.

"There used to be a paper, the *Karpatskaya Pravda*. That was mustard—the Communists put it out—but it was closed down!"

When he said this, a strange feeling stirred in me—almost jealousy, as though he had touched something which was very personal and known only to me.

At last Chonka decided on the *Independent Weekly*. He was acquainted with the editor, Kazarik, a former secondary-school teacher.

Kazarik's weekly was considered an "opposition" paper. Its "opposition" tendency consisted in flaying petty officials for petty offences now and then, and on rare occasions saying something about the autonomy promised to our region but never granted. Verkhovina was Kazarik's pet subject. He wrote sentimentally about wooden churches, oat-cakes, homespun jackets, huts with smoke-vents, thatched cottages, peasant shoes—all of which he called our national character. He published dream-books and fortune-telling books in cheap illustrated editions, and had the reputation of an expert on everything to do with the common folk.

I had little faith in Kazarik agreeing to print my article, but Chonka hastened to reassure me.

"He'll do it all right, that's the kind of man he is! He loves a rowl... Only you'll have to pay for it, otherwise it's no use."

"Pay for it?"

"Not so much, Ivan, but something."

"This is all I've got, Vasil," I said, opening my purse.

"Yes, that's not so bright," Chonka mumbled and thought for a moment. "Never mind, I'll lend you some," he offered magnanimously. "Only don't say anything about it for Heaven's sake."

That same evening Chonka and I stood at the door of the building which housed the newspaper offices and where Kazarik's flat was.

We rang. Footsteps approached the door, and a minute later we were in the editor's office, a big room cluttered up with everything under the sun. There were great piles of books, stacks of newspapers, wooden Verkhovina utensils, and an embroidered sheepskin Hutsul jacket. A *trembita*—a long wooden horn played by our shepherds—hung on the wall.

Kazarik himself turned out to be a round, rosy, talkative little man of about forty, wearing an embroidered shirt and rather tight trousers. His bristly shaven head was set on a very short neck, making him look all puffed up.

The very first moments showed me that Kazarik would much rather talk than listen. He had just returned from a trip to the mountains where he had been collecting ritual songs, and he was bursting with impressions.

"Yes, I assure you," he twittered in a high, womanish voice. "Verkhovina is sorrowful, squalid, mysterious! Take away all that and it will cease to be our Verkhovina; it will lose its soul."

"Excuse me, sir," I broke in, losing patience. "Verkhovina is not a museum, and the people there are not wax figures."

Kazarik jumped up and walked excitedly up and down the room.

"But the soul of Verkhovina?" he cried weightily. "Its national character?"

"That doesn't lie in oat-cakes, or in huts with smoke-vents, and it doesn't lie in the suffering of the people."

Chonka moved uneasily and made signs telling me not to argue, but Kazarik was off on his hobby-horse. He showered us with quotations, he seethed, he insisted that suffering was blessed, that only through suffering did

man rise to his full stature, that it brought nobility to his spirit and was therefore the loftiest of all the emotions.

Something noisome and gruesome at the same time seemed to emanate from this man.

"There's nothing easier than to tell other people they have to suffer," I thrust in, taking advantage of a moment when Kazarik's voice broke. "But why is it that when you have a toothache, you go straight to the dentist instead of revelling in your suffering and writing an ode to a hollow tooth?"

"Gentlemen!" Chonka broke in. "Ivan, Pan Kazarik, we can argue all that out some other time. Let's get down to business. We've come to you about something important. May we have your attention?"

In an instant Kazarik was transformed; all his "ideological" fervour vanished as though he had slipped it into his pocket. His face assumed an expression of concentration. I felt he had already forgotten our argument and what gave rise to it.

Kazarik heard what I had to say, then paced thoughtfully up and down his office.

"To print an article like that involves a great risk for me," he said at last. "But if you insist—I'll do it! In any case, we can discuss the matter. . . ."

Choosing a moment when Kazarik's back was turned, Chonka pulled my sleeve and nodded. I understood the time had come to inquire about the most important thing.

"How much will it cost, Pan Editor?" I mumbled quickly.

Kazarik caught the words at once. He stopped, thrust his hands into his jacket-pockets and, peering at me from under his brows, said:

"Nothing. Bu-u-ut—" and with that long drawn-out "but" he swayed back and forward on his feet—"It is possible, of course, that my paper may suffer by printing such an article, you can see that. We must take every-

thing into account—the persons mentioned—that's one thing; the special nature of the subject—two; and the whole tone of the article—three. . . . Well, say three hundred crowns. . . . But if you agree to modify the article a little, then of course the risk for the paper is less, you can see that, I'm sure, and everything else correspondingly. . . ."

"Three hundred crowns," I thought aloud.

"It is a great risk for the paper, remember," Kazarik repeated. "But I assure you, I recognize the duty of an independent paper to flay the plague-spots in our society."

"Close with it," Chonka whispered. "You won't get it done any cheaper."

I closed with it.

Kazarik took the money as a doctor takes his fee—without looking at it, but with an easy habitual movement.

"It will be in next week's issue, I assure you," he said with a polite smile, as he took leave of us.

As we went down the staircase with its smell of cats and printer's ink, I asked Chonka: "What if he doesn't print it?"

"Then he'll give you the money back," Chonka answered. "He's an honest man. . . ."

21

"In next week's issue. . . ." To my suspense was added the search for a job.

Coming home one day, tired and irritable after fruitlessly applying at various offices, I heard my name called as I was opening the gate.

"Ivanko!"

I turned quickly—who in Uzhgorod would call me "Ivanko"? . . . What was my astonishment and joy to see

Gafia! She was hurrying to me from the garden across the street—tall and thin, a bundle in her hand.

"Mother!" I cried, for the first time calling her by that name. A warm glow filled me; in that moment this tall, quiet woman seemed like some all-powerful protector, and I ran to her as I used to run to my own mother when she came home from work.

"Ivanko, Ivanko," said Gafia. "I've been waiting for you a long time. The people here said you'd be coming late."

I was too happy to be alarmed at seeing her in Uzhgorod, although I knew well that Gafia had not left Studenitsa more than once or twice in her life.

When I had taken her into the wing, however, and made her sit down, the bundle at her feet, I began to feel uneasy—could something have happened to Gorulya? Gafia guessed my thoughts and, without waiting for any questions, explained: "I've come to the doctor, Ivanko. My chest hurts me. And all night I keep coughing."

She spoke quickly, avoiding my eyes.

"And did *Vuiku* let you come all this way alone?"

"And what could happen to me?" said Gafia. "I'm not a child. And Ilko's got enough to worry him without me. . . . You've got thin, Ivanko—eh, but you're thin! . . . I've brought you a chicken here, and a bit of our cheese and some eggs. Semyon Rushchak, he gave me your address. . . ." She unfastened the bundle as she spoke.

"Why did you bother about that? You shouldn't. . . ." I protested. But Gafia brushed me aside.

"Take it, Ivanko, you needn't be feared to take it, we're your own folks," she said and sighed. "Eh, but I wish it was more. . . ."

"How are things at home?" I asked after a short pause.

"Rain . . . fog. . . ."

"It's been raining here too. . . . And how's *Vuiku*? . . . Is he still angry with me?"

Gafia pretended not to have heard the question. She said nothing for a moment, then raised her eyes to my face and asked cautiously: "And how's it wi' you here, Ivanko?"

Pride and reluctance to trouble Gafia made me say: "Everything's all right. I'm just waiting for a decision." But the lie came with difficulty.

"Are they treating you well?"

"Of course, why shouldn't they?" I forced a laugh. "Who'd treat me wrong?"

Gafia's faint sigh told me that my show did not altogether convince her.

This put a certain constraint on us. I tried to turn the conversation to Gorulya, but Gafia answered in hesitating monosyllables, and suddenly found that she had to hurry away.

"I've got to go, Ivanko, I'm sitting here as if I had a week to stop."

"I'll go to the doctor with you," I said. For some reason the suggestion seemed to upset Gafia.

"Nay, nay," she said quickly, raising her hands as though to ward me off. "Don't you come, Ivanko, I'll go by myself."

"Why, what are you talking about!" I protested. "I'm not letting you go there alone!"

Gafia caught my hand and whispered: "Don't you come, Ivanko, I'm asking you not to. . . ."

There was such fear and pleading in that whisper that I let her have her way.

I went with Gafia to the gate. She walked hurriedly down the street without looking back once, and as I gazed after her, the thought struck me—perhaps Gorulya was waiting for her somewhere near?

Pouring rain beat against the window, and behind its watery curtain the street-lamps seemed to waver uncertainly.

Chonka, gloomy and distraught, sat in my room in his waterproof with its collar turned up, holding a half-open, dripping umbrella. A pool of water was slowly forming on the floor from his umbrella but we took no notice of it.

"What a bastard!" he kept repeating. "My God, what a bastard! He got paid well for this. He wrote it himself, sure as I sit here!"

His words flowed past me, leaving no impression. My mind was in a tumult.

A crumpled newspaper lay on the table. An article was printed in it. But it was not my article. It was about me. In the pert, cheap manner of the gutter press it called me a charlatan and ignoramus, and my memorandum a farrago of nonsense written in the hope of making a career for myself. It was signed merely with the initials "A.B."

I was stunned.

"Leshchetsky's had a hand in this," said Chonka after a minute's sombre thought. "It's all a business deal. Kazarik took your article to Leshchetsky so as to get more money out of him than you paid. And Leshchetsky bought both the article and Kazarik. That's how it's done!... Now don't let it get you down, Ivan, listen, don't take it so hard, there's nothing you can do about it! Maybe we can think of something else? Listen, I'll go to Kazarik and Leshchetsky and bash their faces in if you want. Don't sit there saying nothing, Ivan!"

"Yes... yes, we'll have to think of something," I repeated mechanically.

Chonka rose and took a few steps up and down the room, frowning.

"Listen, Ivan, you mustn't take it too much to heart. It'll all blow over, people will forget about it soon, you'll see!"

He went on sighing and swearing for a long time, fumbling with his umbrella. At last he left me.

The empty room was unbearable. I felt the need for air. I threw on a mackintosh and went out hatless into the rain, crossed the garden and walked into the empty street.

It stretched out before me like a long dark corridor. The lights at the house doors burned dimly, drearily, as though forgotten and abandoned there in the damp gloom.

The rain on my bare head and the gusts of wind brought me a certain relief. My stunned mind began to function again unsurely, with pauses, like a clock newly wound that has not been going for a long time. . . . "The truth is hard to hear. . . ." Who had said that? . . . Kur-tinets. . . . I saw his face before me through the grey curling tobacco-smoke, like some memory of the distant past. . . . "The truth is hard to hear." There it was, the truth. . . .

I turned off into a side-street and found myself before the door of an all-night café. Mechanically I pushed it open and entered a smoky room green with the sickly light of a gas-burner. Late customers were drinking wine at the bar. Two lean Gipsies scraped at fiddles, rolling their eyes and beating time with their feet.

I went up to the bar.

"What will you take, sir?" asked the barman, cocking his head in expectation.

"Anything," I said.

The barman took a glass from the shelf and filled it with pinkish wine.

The customers were already drunk and shouted at each other as though they were all deaf.

I drank off the wine in one breath, as a thirsty man drinks water.

"The best in Uzhgorod!" said the barman, clicking his tongue. "Wouldn't you say so?"

I made no reply but signed to him to refill the glass. I gulped down a second glassful, then a third, but it had no effect except to carry a shivering warmth through my body.

"Another?" asked the barman, the bottle tilted ready in his hand.

"Yes, another," I nodded.

Sparkling and gurgling, the pinkish liquid filled my glass again and again. And still I could not get drunk. My head felt light and clear, and each time I said "another," the word seemed to ring out challengingly over the drunken babble of the other customers. One of them, standing with his back to me, turned suddenly and stared at me with dull eyes.

"Hey, you," he said, his tongue moving with difficulty, "lesh ha' a drink—lesh drink damnation to everything! Thash my toasht—to hell wi' everything!" Then, already oblivious of my existence, he dropped his head on to the counter.

"The best carriages in town!" the barman whispered, with a jerk of his head towards the drunken man. "His wife ran away with a travelling salesman from Košice, haven't you heard? The whole town was talking about it!... Another glass?"

"No." I shook my head and paid.

Out in the street, a chill went through my body. My face burned and it pained my eyes even to look into the darkness. At times, as though set going by some impetus, my thoughts worked with feverish clarity. Yes, Kurtinets was right, everything he had said was right. All I had dreamed of doing was of no use to the Governor, Leshchetsky, all the deputies and senators.

Use?—it was anathema to them, opposed to all the string they stood for. Gorulya had understood that. . . . Dull confusion again flooded my mind and I now felt only the painful shivering that shook me.

I remember nothing of how I got back to the Lembeis, how I opened the gate and entered the wing. All I know is that I picked up the green folder from the table and with calm, measured movements tore the pages out of it one by one. Then just as coolly I pushed the bundle of paper into the stove and set a match to it.

A blue flame curled lazily over one of the pages. It straightened up like some living thing, and I saw that it was the first page of the introduction; as it unfolded, my eye caught the words about Mikola and the key: "...and still the land is locked." Then the blue flame licked up the page, turning it into charred ash. I felt neither regret nor repentance, I felt absolutely nothing. A burst of golden flame spread over the whole mass of paper, black fragments flew up the chimney—and I remember nothing more.

23

Ten days struck out of my life. The only memory I have of them is the brief flashes of consciousness when, through the dull veil of delirium, I vaguely distinguished the faces of people bending over me and heard the sound of voices. But with the faintest effort to move or speak, the faces faded, the sounds merged into one vibrating note and I lost consciousness again.

Ten days. Now they were behind me. My eyes were open, and Ruzhana was bending over me. Her cheeks were hollow and I could see tears trembling on her eye-lashes.

"Why are you crying?" I said, and my voice sounded strange and far away.

"I don't know. . . . Everything's going to be all right now. . . ."

Life with its feelings, memories and longings returned to me—cautiously, tentatively, as though testing the extent to which my feeble strength could bear its burden. I realized where I was and what had happened; I could see that it was day, the sun was shining and the wind was tossing the bare trees outside my window. I could see the bottles with chemist's labels on the small table by my bed, and felt the spoonful of lemon-water that Ruzhana was holding to my parched lips.

"Drink that," she said.

I drank obediently, but awkwardly, in sips.

"I've forgotten how to drink," I said.

The look of maternal care on Ruzhana's face was soothing.

"What day is it?" I asked.

Ruzhana told me.

"Have I been very ill?"

"Yes, you've been very ill, but now it's all over. Only you mustn't think of anything, and you mustn't talk much—it isn't good for you. . . . There's only one thing I want to tell you—when you were ill a Pan Matlakh came to inquire about you. He said that you and he were from the same village, and he asked me to tell you that as soon as you're well enough he wants to see you."

"Matlakh?" I said. "Yes, we're from the same village. . . . What does he want?"

"Now you're getting excited," said Ruzhana reproachfully. "If I'd known, I wouldn't have told you."

"No, I'm not excited. . . . Matlakh? . . . Did he say what he wanted with me?"

"No. He came to Uzhgorod to see a doctor. There's something wrong with his legs, he can't use them. . . . He'll be coming again soon. Now that's all! You mustn't ask anything more!"

I was so tired that my eyes closed of themselves, and I fell asleep.

Chonka rushed in to see me as soon as he came home from the bank.

"That's grand—everything's all right and you've got your head up again!" he cried, flinging himself heavily into the arm-chair. "Listen, what about a little drink to celebrate? No? Why not? Oh, Ruzhana! Never mind her—what do women know about wine? Nothing at all!"

Chonka, too, talked about Matlakh.

"The devil alone knows what he wants with you! But if it's Matlakh it's something serious. He's climbing high, everybody's afraid of him. A bully? Of course he's a bully, but he's a man of his word. If he says: 'I'll eat you up,' he does it—bones and all! And if he says: 'I'll bury you in gold,' he does that too."

"Bones and all?" Ruzhana asked with a smile.

"That can happen too, in business," Chonka said.

It was only some days later that Ruzhana allowed me a short walk in the garden. She took a great pleasure in mothering me, and I—an equally great pleasure in being mothered. Sometimes she would keep me company, walking up and down the path, asking me all about Verkhovina, Brno, and people whom I knew. I told her about Gorulya, the Bystroye teacher, Gafia and Marek. To Ruzhana these were people from another world, quite different from those she knew.

A cloud, however, fell on the joy of recovery. I very soon noticed how curtly the old man and Pani Julia spoke to me. Ruzhana's red eyes and Chonka's irritability showed me plainly that there was dissension in the Lembei house and that I was the cause of it.

At last Chonka told me about the storm which had raged when Ruzhana had not allowed them to send me to hospital, and, ignoring the outraged indignation of her family, had herself undertaken to nurse me. For ten days

she had not left my bedside, carefully carrying out all the doctor's instructions.

"Just imagine!" said Chonka. "All her life she'd never disobeyed them, and now—this! The old man and Julia haven't got over it yet. And besides, Ivan, they believe everything that was written in that wretched article. . . . But don't you take any notice of them, let them think what they like. If it comes to that, I'm the master here, I support the lot of them, and that's that!"

I was grateful to Chonka, but with all my gratitude and my affection for Ruzhana, I felt stifled in the close atmosphere of the Lembei house. My pride was lacerated, and the knowledge that I had nowhere to go was a torment.

I began looking for work as soon as I could stand on my legs.

At first it seemed as though luck would favour me: I got two addresses of places where an agronomist was needed. I hurried to one, but alas!—no sooner had I mentioned my name than there was a pause, and I was politely told that unfortunately the vacancy was already filled. The same thing happened in the next place.

Chonka, too, was met with a refusal when he tried to get me a position as clerk in a private office. He had been quite confident that the job was mine, but when he came home from the bank in the evening, he shrugged his shoulders despondently.

"Nothing doing, Ivanko. That foul article spoils everything."

Miserable weeks passed in a fruitless search for work. At first I still hugged the hope of some lucky chance coming my way, but in the end even this mirage faded. Thus still another joined the unemployed men standing on the foot-bridge watching the fishermen.

Autumn soon laid its hand on the river. The Uzh became swift and deep with the mountain rains. The fish-

ermen disappeared, leaving their tall stools under the bridge to wait for spring; only I, and those who had now become my companions, remained staring for hours on end at the tumultuous river.

One morning as I was going out I came face to face with Ruzhana at my door. Now, despite all the troubles that weighed upon me, whenever Ruzhana and I met, it was with a mingled feeling of joy and embarrassment. The frank and easy companionship that marked the first days of our acquaintance was, gradually, ourselves hardly aware of it, giving way to a certain shy constraint and naive cautiousness, as though we were trying to hide our secret from each other. But precisely for the reason that our secret was no longer a secret to either of us, we did not feel at ease in each other's presence. At times it seemed that we had nothing to say to each other, and we would sit for a long time in silence, each fearing to meet the other's gaze. However, the constraint we now experienced and the long periods of silence were not in the least oppressive; on the contrary, they were precious moments, moments filled with happy anticipation. And in the same way that a flash of light in the night will make the darkness seem blacker still, the hostile forces that gathered about me appeared now more hostile than ever, and were, it seemed to me, casting a shadow between Ruzhana and myself.

"Pan Belinets," Ruzhana said, smoothing her luxuriant hair, "this is for you." And she handed me a letter.

I unfolded a sheet covered with a secretary's small neat handwriting. "Pan Belinets, I have read your memorandum. If you are not ill, come to me at Hotel Bercsenyi. Petro Matlakh."

I held out the letter to Ruzhana.

"How has Matlakh got hold of my memorandum, I wonder?" I said, when she had read it. "I never sent it to him."

"Why, is it bad that he's got it?"

"I'm just puzzled," I said. "What does he want with it, anyway?"

Ruzhana looked embarrassed.

"Please forgive me for not asking you first. The copy you sent to the Ministry came back while you were ill. Father Novak was interested in your memorandum and asked to read it. He's a very learned man and very kind. He told me it was his duty as a Christian to help you on to the right road."

"So it was Father Novak who gave my memorandum to Matlakh?"

"Yes, when Pan Matlakh comes to Uzhgorod, he always talks to our Spiritual Father. . . . Please don't be annoyed with me. . . . Both Father Novak and I only want your good."

There was a pause.

"He's waiting over there for an answer," Ruzhana said shyly and turned her head in the direction of the house.

I roused myself.

"An answer? Who is waiting?"

"The man who brought the letter."

I crossed the court-yard, with Ruzhana at my side, and approached the house. Waiting for me by the stairs leading to the gallery of the house, stood Matlakh's messenger—his secretary Szabo. In an instant I recalled all Gorulya had told me about Szabo; I also recollected how he had hurled a stick at Olena as she ran down the street in Studenitsa, and I was seized by a feeling of repulsion for this creature, who was now clicking his heels in the manner of a schoolboy and saying: "I have the honour. . . ."

I wondered whether he had recognized me. It seemed to me he had, for he darted a stealthy glance at me and lowered his eyes.

I now had ample opportunity to study the man.

He looked about forty-five years of age; everything about him seemed unnaturally thin and narrow—his face, his shoulders, his ears, having elongated lobes of a wax-like transparency, his hands with the long, shuffling fingers of a sharper. He wore knickerbockers, a bow-tie and a jacket of indefinite colour with great big pockets: this attire only helped to emphasize the attenuation of his form. Depravity and cruelty were written all over him, which neither his ingratiating smile nor obsequious manner could hide from an observant eye.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Pan Engineer," Szabo spoke. "I am Matlakh's secretary, my name is Szabo. Your wife?" His eyes rested on Ruzhana. "Not your wife? I beg your pardon, sir. I thought to myself—what a beautiful lady and what a happy pair. Please, excuse me."

"Kindly tell Matlakh," I cut short Szabo's effusiveness, "that I shall come to see him tomorrow afternoon, at two o'clock."

"Tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock?" Szabo repeated my words. "Very well, sir, I shall tell him. Good-bye." He again clicked his heels.

24

A shining black boot painted on glass, a piece of soap in a shining halo, two rows of gleaming white teeth, and the inscriptions: "Today Europe knows that Bât'a boots are the best for comfort and wear; tomorrow the world will know it!" "Swan soap—the world's best!"

This was the door of the Bercsenyi Hotel. I opened it and a few steps brought me to the desk.

"Pan Matlakh?—Twenty-two!" said the clerk in answer to my inquiry. "But you'll have to wait a little, sir,

till the doctors go. Three doctors!" He turned round and shouted: "Joška!"

The figure of a messenger-boy popped out of a cubby-hole under the stairs.

"Take the gentleman to number twenty-two!"

The boy bowed, edged past me sideways and led me up the stairs to the first floor.

"It's the fifth door on the right," he said, pointing down the long, badly-lighted corridor. "You can wait here," and he jerked his head at an old plush-covered sofa.

I did not have to wait long, only about ten minutes, but they seemed endless.

"What does Matlakh want with me?"—the question flashed through my mind for the hundredth time.

A door opened along the dim corridor and three men passed me, buttoning up their overcoats. "Three doctors"—the reception clerk's words returned to me. After the doctors came Szabo and a burly young fellow with a red, shining, extremely self-satisfied face. It was Matlakh junior.

I waited a little, then went along the passage to number twenty-two and knocked.

"Who's there? Come in," snapped an irritated voice.

I entered.

A corpulent man with a flabby face pushed forward belligerently stood in the middle of the room, supporting himself with one hand on the edge of the table, the other on the back of a chair. It was obviously difficult for him to stand, but stubbornly, defiantly, he refused to sit. Everything he wore was meagre and skimpy—on his stomach a white shirt pushed out from under his waistcoat, his trousers barely covered his shins, and big red hands that looked as if they had just been washed in very cold water projected from sleeves too short for his arms. Yes, Matlakh had certainly aged.

"They're all a bunch of swindlers, I tell you!" cried

Matlakh, barely answering my greeting. "I can see right through all them doctors wi' their talk. I'm not to eat this and not to drink that, and they want to shut me up in a sanatorium for a whole year! They'd do better to say straight out that they can't do anything for me, and that's the end of it! Let 'em tell me straight out, and not go on wheedling money out o' me! I don't make money to throw it away!"

With great difficulty, uncertain as a child learning to walk, Matlakh took two steps, holding the back of the chair, and sat down on the edge of the bed. All trace of his rage against the doctors disappeared so suddenly that I was startled by this quick change to composure.

"I've been expecting you, Pan Belinets," he said in a business-like tone, and his searching, probing gaze mustered me unceremoniously from head to foot, halting somewhere on the toes of my boots. "I used to be good friends wi' your Dad once upon a time. . . . Sit down."

I thanked him and took a chair, expecting the usual questions and reminiscences; to my surprise, however, nothing of the sort came.

"Let's talk business, Pan Belinets," said Matlakh almost before I was seated. "I read all that in the paper about you, and I read all that stuff you've written. . . . I don't take much stock o' the paper, that's the way they make their living—if they don't tell lies they'll go under. Eh, and you've given me a good pasting, too, a good hard pasting!"

"I wrote what I thought," I said curtly.

"And you thought wrong," Matlakh caught me up. "What d'you think I am—a wolf? Of course, there was that time when those fools o' mine treated Olena hard. That was bad. . . . If I'd been home, d'you think I'd ever have let it happen? Well, what's past is past, what's the good of remembering it when there's still today and tomorrow?"

He looked round the room, found what he sought, and said: "If you don't mind, will you give me that book o' yours, or whatever learned folks call it. . . . It's over there, on that table."

I rose, looked on the table, and for the first time noticed a familiar green folder. A hot wave flooded my face, and my fingers trembled as I picked it up and handed it to Matlakh.

"I read all you wrote here," said Matlakh, and turned some pages; they rustled under his fingers like bank-notes counted by a teller. "You know, Pan Belinets, I never guessed before that Verkhovina could be so rich, and there you saw it all at once!" Matlakh stopped at one of the pages.

"Here," he said, holding out the folder. "Read out that bit I've marked in lead."

I took the folder and saw two thick pencilled lines in the margin of the page.

"Read that out," and Matlakh poked at the paragraph with a thick forefinger.

It was the idea which had come to me from Gorulya's dreams by the fire in the hut. How long ago had that been? Ages seemed to have passed since that evening.

"Who can say?" I read. "It may be that when the problem of grain is solved in Verkhovina, highly-productive dairy-farming may develop there, in no way inferior to that of Switzerland. Man will transform the poor soil of the mountain-sides and pastures into rich meadows, and dairy-farms will become an integral part of the Verkhovina landscape. This, however, is a thing for the future. Bread for the population—that is what our Verkhovina needs."

For an instant I recalled the day and hour when I had written those lines, the confidence which I had felt, the fair picture of our region my imagination painted. . . .

Matlakh's voice brought me back to the present.

"What if I set up dairy-farms in Verkhovina, Pan Belinets?"

"You?"

"Why not?"

"You want my advice?"

"Nay, I've got that already," said Matlakh. "I read it all in here." He jerked his head towards my memorandum.

"What advice?" I said with a feeling of vague uneasiness. "I didn't write about individual farms, but of the whole region, and the dairy-farms are just a dream of what could perhaps be done sometime in the future. . . ."

"It may be a dream for some," said Matlakh. "But for me it's a bit of good advice."

"Well, that's your affair," I said, forcing a smile. "If there's a chance of starting a dairy-farm and getting the feed, it might be well worth while."

"That's my mind too," said Matlakh, and his eyes burned with avarice. "First I'll start one, then a second and a third, and maybe a tenth."

He said this huskily, almost in a whisper, with the air of a man completely sure of himself.

"You think I haven't the money to do it? I've got it all right! Bât'a started as a cobbler, they say, and now he's the boot king! Why shouldn't I try the same? Start off in a small way, and then branch out till everybody says Matlakh's butter's the best, till it's not some Swiss cheese that folks ask for, but mine, Matlakh's! I shan't grudge the cash to get my name in electric lights over the roofs. What do I need to start with? Good cattle instead of our Carpathian brown cows? All right, I'll get Swiss. I've got enough land to start off with, and when I want more, I'll buy it! Herdsmen? I'll get them too!"

To me, Matlakh's plans sounded like the ravings of a highly ambitious and avaricious person obsessed by the greed for wealth. He seemed to guess my thoughts.

"I know what you're thinking, I know!" he said with a laugh. "Why don't you say it right out—'Old Matlakh's taken leave of his senses'! Isn't that what you're thinking? Nay, my wits are all there, Pan Belinets, I've lain awake nights reckoning it all out. Look, here's the figures!" He opened the collar of his shirt and took out a bladder containing a package of money and a thick, worn note-book. He began turning over pages covered with figures.

"What d'you say now?" asked Matlakh. "It'll take money? Don't you worry about that, that's my business... Yours is to get fodder for my farms, Pan Belinets, plenty o' good fodder. I need a man like you."

His concluding words were like a whip-lash. To work for Matlakh? So that was why he wanted to see me! The blood rushed to my face, the room went dark before my eyes, and I felt as though somebody were drawing me to the very edge of a precipice.

"No, Pan Matlakh," I said in a choked voice, "I cannot accept your offer."

"And you're wrong," said Matlakh, frowning. "I tell you, you're wrong, man. You'll have to work for somebody, won't you? If it isn't me it'll be another. What's the difference?" Then he added magnanimously: "Well, never mind, I didn't hear you. Think it over a bit, I can wait. Though I don't mind telling you, I don't see what you've got to think about. I'm not asking you to be a partner, I'm not asking you to put any money in it. I'll give you land and you can do what you want wi' it, all that you've written here... I doubt if you'll find anything better, Pan Belinets. And I'll treat you right."

I left the hotel crushed and depressed.

"He's right in one thing," I thought. "If it's not him, it'll be someone else no better. I'll never get into government service now, it's no use thinking of that. What can

I do, where can I go? Carry a cardboard boot round the streets again, or return to Gorulya and be a burden to him?... No, not for anything in the world! But Mat-lakh ... Matlakh ... that's asking too much!"

Again that harassing search for work began. I still have a copy of a newspaper with my advertisement in the last column: "Agronomist, Brno college diploma. Any district. Write Uzhgorod, Box D/23."

Every day I went to the post office, opened my box and found it empty. "Never mind," I told myself, "there'll be something tomorrow." But tomorrow brought no change.

Chonka lent me the three hundred crowns which that "honest man" Kazarik had duly returned. I went to Pryashev, Mukachevo and Beregovo, but with no result. Soviet people of my generation can have no idea of that horrible feeling when an able-bodied man with an education, a profession and an earnest desire to apply them, finds that nobody wants him. Even the dreams of the unemployed man are burdened with heavy gloom; he longs for morning, but morning only heightens his despair. The day is endless, he sees enemies all round, his brain becomes dull and torpid, his movements heavy and listless. A job, oh for a job!

At last fate seemed to take pity on me—I found a postcard in Box D/23. Like a starving man snatching at a crust, I seized that yellowish card and read: "Pani Gedes offers Pan Agronomist Belinets the position of steward on a small estate. Pan Belinets is requested to come for an interview to Pani Gedes' house, Beneš Street, No. 10, Beregovo."

Pani Gedes received me affably. She was a widow, her estate was small, she herself lived in town, and she needed a steward whom she could trust. As I had no

recommendations, only my college diploma, Pani Gedes asked me to wait a few days. I returned to Uzhgorod and waited. The reply from Beregovo came very soon. I found a postcard in Box D/23.

"Pani Gedes has the honour to inform Pan Belinets that upon applying to the Agricultural Department, the reply received was not in his favour. Pani Gedes much regrets, therefore, that she cannot accept his services."

The noose tightened round my throat. That foul article and Leshchetsky blocked my way at every turn. . . . And in the Lembei house, where I was forced to remain, I was driven to desperation by gossip and squabbles, and the reproaches which Julia hurled every day at her husband for allowing a man, whom all decent people turned away from, to live on their charity. I had nothing to hope for; but to go on living in this way, in humiliating dependence on the reluctant charity of old Lembei and Julia, I could endure no longer.

. . . Again Matlakh's secretary Szabo came from Hotel Bercsenyi with a note for me. I ran my eyes down it and crumpled it in my hand. . . .

Matlakh was waiting for me at the hotel. He testily pushed away his son who wished to help him, and rose to greet me—heavy, obese and flabby, supporting himself on the edge of the table and the back of the bed.

"Well, Pan Belinets, have you made up your mind yet? It's time you did, you won't regret it. . . . I know, you keep on thinking: 'What, work for Matlakh!' But it's Verkhovina you'll be working for. What d'you think I am, d'you think I can't see what it's like, our Verkhovina? I can see it all. . . . But we'll put it on its feet! I'm not joking. I'll cover Verkhovina wi' dairy-farms from Jasina right to Slovakia. Just give me time to get going and you'll see—I'll give 'em all work, none'll be left wanting. . . . And your job is to help me wi' that science of yours."

I listened with hanging head. There was nobody to advise me, I had to decide for myself.

"What if by some lucky chance I do manage to find a job on some estate," I thought, "there'll be another Matlakh there, all the same. It's only the name will be different. Here at least I'll be working in my own mountains and maybe I'll be able to help the folks there a bit. . . . It's either that, or going back to the Lembeis'."

There was no alternative. . . .

"It's a deal, then, Pan Belinets?" said Matlakh. "Well, God grant we do well on it!"

25

Despite all his resistance, in the end Matlakh had to give in to the doctors. He would probably have continued stubbornly holding out in the hope the trouble would pass over of itself, but one morning he awakened to find his legs completely paralyzed. Frightened, he began to shout for help.

The doctors ordered him to go to Prague at once, and he obeyed.

I was not in Uzhgorod that day. I had gone to Mukachevo to talk to Matlakh's agent about setting up the first dairy-farm. Chonka opened the door to me on my return.

"Where've you been all this time?" he cried. "Matlakh's been wanting you. Go to the station as quick as you can!"

"Why the station?" I asked, surprised.

"Why, don't you know?" cried Chonka. "Your boss is going to Prague. His son came half an hour ago and told me to let you know that Matlakh was expecting you at the station."

I found Matlakh sitting on a folding-chair on the

station-platform, his legs wrapped in one of those black homespun shawls that the women of the lowland villages wear in winter instead of a coat, and an old Verkhovina knapsack at his feet. There were two men with him—his son and Szabo.

Matlakh was grim and business-like.

"I've got to go, Pan Belinets, devil take 'em all!" he said when he saw me. "I thought I'd manage without. . . . Think o' the money I'm going to be losing all along o' those devils! Well, did you get anything done in Mukachevo?"

I reported everything in detail.

"That's good, then," said Matlakh, looking a little more cheerful. "You'll have to try and get on by yourself, Pan Belinets. Don't waste time wi' me not there. Do all that wants doing. I've got some money for you here, go away a bit and count it, I've counted it already."

He opened his shirt at the neck as he had done in the hotel and took a package of money from the bladder.

"Why should I count it if you've already done so?" I asked.

"Nay, you count it too," Matlakh insisted. "Money likes being handled. And then you write me out a receipt here, on this paper, for what I've given you."

I counted the money and wrote the required receipt. Matlakh read it, moving his lips, then slipped it into the bladder and refastened his shirt.

"Well, there's a start," he said. "If it wasn't for them legs o' mine we'd get on quicker. . . . When I come back I'll take a hand myself. I've heard tell Băt'a looks in everywhere even now. The master's eye! . . . On the way back I'll go to Zlin and see how he's going on there, maybe I'll get an idea or two. . . . Started as a cobbler, and now look where he is! . . ."

As we talked, the platform had been filling up. The train rolled slowly in. The conductors in their helmets

stood on the steps of the coaches. Passengers' voices mingled with the squeaking wheels of luggage-carts and the warning shouts of porters.

"Time to be getting in," said Matlakh. "Good-bye, then."

"Get me up, Andrei," said Matlakh to his son.

To my amazement Andrei raised Matlakh and carried him without the slightest effort—as though he were a rag-bag rather than a man.

Szabo picked up the chair and knapsack and hurried after Matlakh.

"Yes, yes, Pan Belinets, you must have been born under a lucky star, we're all so glad for your sake! You poor dear man, how much you've suffered! No, don't say anything, I know how terrible it must have been to be slandered like that! I was so sorry for you, but I always told Vasil that virtue would triumph and you would receive your reward. Now you can see how right I was. Father says that nobody could wish for anything better than working for Pan Matlakh. Oh, how glad we all are for your sake!"

That was Julia. She had met me in the little garden, invited me into the house and for Heaven knows how long had been showering me with compliments and going into ecstasies of joy over my good fortune in getting a job with Matlakh.

I was ashamed—both of myself and of Julia. I watched Ruzhana out of the corner of my eye. She stood by the window with her back to me, at the far, dim end of the dining-room. Had she any idea of what I was going through?

A dull thud sounded outside the door, followed by the wail of a child. Salvation! Julia jumped up and ran into the next room.

Ruzhana quickly turned and came to me. I could read shame and a heaviness of heart in her face.

"Let's go out," Ruzhana suggested.

"Where?"

"Wherever you like—anywhere."

"We'll take a walk round town—shall we?"

"Yes, anywhere."

There was a slight frost and the sky was bright with stars. It was not yet late, but the streets were deserted. Lights shone through the drawn curtains in the windows.

The farther we went from the Lembei house, the lighter my heart became, as though all that weighed me down had been left behind with Julia.

For a long time we walked in silence.

The streets led uphill, past the church on Tsegolnyanskaya. Gravel crunched under our feet. At a fork in the road we turned right, and the hill became steeper.

"What street is this, Ruzhana?"

"Vysokaya, I think."

On the left-hand side of the street stood the houses in their gardens; on the right, vineyards covered the steep slope. We came out on the crest of the hill and the whole town lay spread out before us. From that height its lights seemed dim, and glowed rather than sparkled. It looked as though somebody had scattered them like grain in the dark Tisza valley and they were huddling together. A few had wandered far away into the night, to the gleaming thread of the Chop on the horizon.

"Why have we come up here?" asked Ruzhana.

"Because it's high up. Human beings love heights."

"Do they?" said Ruzhana in something between surprise and thoughtfulness. "You know, it seems to me that you have a very high opinion of people."

"With the exception of myself," I said ruefully. "But the world really has a great many very fine people. Don't you think so?"

"I've never thought about it at all," said Ruzhana. "Only I remember once, when I was little, Mother took me through a cemetery at night. I was frightened, but Mother laughed at me. 'There's nothing to be afraid of here,' she said. 'It's the living you have to fear—they're always ready to tear at each other's throats. There's no need to fear the dead—they're the best people there are.' "

"And after that you stopped being afraid of dead people?"

"No, after that I began to be afraid of the living."

"Am I included?"

"No." Ruzhana paused, looked up at me, and shook her head. "I am not afraid of you."

Shyly, I linked my arm in hers. For a moment she held her breath, like one unexpectedly come to a cross-roads, but soon I felt her nestle up close to my arm. This gesture of trust and affection was far more eloquent than words. It filled me with a quiet, ineffable bliss; and with it came the knowledge that a being, who was now more precious to me than anyone else in the world, was ready to unite her life with mine.

Strands of Ruzhana's hair, breaking loose from under her hat, brushed against my cheek. Reverently, fearing in any way to defile the beauty of our new-born love, I pressed my lips against them.

"Don't," Ruzhana begged, "don't, Ivanko, somebody might see us."

"Who?"

"Supposing the stars do," Ruzhana said with a smile. I smiled back at her.

"The stars? That won't be the first time. Think of all the lovers, like ourselves, they're looking down at right now, and all that were before us and all that will come after us."

"To me it seems, Ivanko, that there are only you and I, and my one great longing," Ruzhana here lowered her

voice to a whisper, "is that we may always be thus, together, always at one."

"And in all things," I added.

Ruzhana started.

"But isn't love, the fact that we . . . love each other, isn't that everything?"

"It's ever so much, but not all," I replied.

"Not all to you," Ruzhana remarked sadly. "I believe you have a bottomless heart, Ivanko."

"Is that good or bad?"

"I do not know, but people with such hearts are, as a rule, unhappy. And I want happiness for both of us, that is not asking so very much, is it?"

"No more than all people ask for."

"Again you are bringing all people in," Ruzhana said reproachfully. "Well, I shall accept that, too. You see how humble I am."

"Ruzhana, sweetheart. . . ." I kissed her hand, looking into her eyes which beamed with a soft, tender warmth.

26

I spent the winter travelling, buying seed, calculating feed rations and dividing Matlakh's land into fields for sowing.

Matlakh very soon returned from Prague. The professors there, with their contradictory advice and not very hopeful promises, irritated him no less than the doctors at Uzhgorod. The thought of having to spend God knows how much time in getting treatment, and seeing money flying up the chimney just when he was launching something real big, drove Matlakh to dull fury. The passion for gain was stronger than physical disability. He could not stand it all and ran away from Prague. Those were the words he used when telling me about it—"ran away."



I lived part of the time in Veretski, where Matlakh's cattle were temporarily housed, and part of the time in Mukachevo.

I saw Ruzhana rarely, only when business brought me to Uzhgorod. She was now the only bright spot in my life.

The very sight of Ruzhana, the sound of her voice, blotted out bitterness and Matlakh, the deception around me and Leshchetsky, making me aware only of her and of our love, which was life's prize for all the hardship and injustice I had to endure.

It was certainly no surprise for old Lembei when I knocked at his door one day and asked if he could spare me a few moments. He consented with a majestic air, and while I talked, his leaden eyes bored unwinkingly into me, as though he were seeing me for the first time.

"That's all very well," he growled when I had finished. "But remember, I haven't anything to give you with Ruzhana."

"I don't want a dowry!" I cried. "I don't want anything but Ruzhana herself."

"You may not want it," the old man said testily. "But I, Pan Belinets, have to see my daughter provided for. That love of yours won't take you far, you can't eat it and you can't drink it. What can you offer?"

"I've no capital," I said, looking Lembei in the eye. "But I'm working. And people can live happily without..."

"No, no," the old man interrupted. "I know about happiness and where it comes from better than you do. Make a secure place for yourself in the world, and I shall have no objections. When I married, I had my own roof over my head. Well, Pan Belinets, when you've got yours, then you're welcome to Ruzhana." With those words he rose to indicate that the interview was at an end.

Ruzhana was waiting for me in Chonka's part of the house. She was sitting on the floor building a house of

coloured bricks for Vasil's two-year-old boy, who looked very much like his father and now stood watching his aunt with his hands behind his back.

As I opened the door, Ruzhana jumped up quickly, the bricks thudding dully on to the carpet.

I tried to look cheerful, but Ruzhana read my face at a glance.

"We ought to have expected it," she said despondently, on hearing what her father had said. "Oh dear, when will all this end?"

All the day before I left, Ruzhana sat locked in her room, and when she came out to say good-bye her eyes were dry and sunken.

"What have you decided, dear?" she said barely audible. It was the first time she used the word, and it made my heart sing and stiffened my determination.

"We've got to be together, Ruzhana."

"Yes, Ivanko, whatever happens."

27

In the spring workmen began to swing their axes at a place some six miles from Studenitsa. Matlakh was building the cow-houses for his first farm.

Men were hired for the season from Studenitsa and other villages. Their white homespun shirts moved here and there over the mountain-side, and more kept coming to Matlakh to ask for work.

The hired men ploughed up the virgin soil, dug ditches to drain away the rain and planted hazel bushes along the edges of the ravines; as day succeeded day, the fields began to take shape—fields on which crop rotation was to be a strict rule.

Matlakh burned with impatience, he could not sit still. Every day his carriage drawn by two well-fed horses

came along the road by the fields. He would stop the horses at the turn by the Woodman's Bridge, where he could get a good view of most of his fields, and sit there for a whole hour, his eyes fixed upon them as though drinking them in.

"It's good," he would say. "It's good, but it's too little!"

"What's too little, Pan Matlakh?"

"Don't you know that yourself? Everything! The cattle and the land, too."

"There's enough land here for fifty head."

"I know that!" said Matlakh angrily. "But what if I get more cattle, eh?"

"Then of course the land isn't enough," I agreed.

"And that's what we've got to talk about—what there isn't, not what there is. I'm just starting, but once I've got going you won't stop me!"

Sometimes I had to go to the summer pastures by Veretski. Thirty selected cows were grazing there, and the herdsman was—who do you think?—Semyon Rushchak!

Semyon! Can it be you, Semyon? What brought you, the farmer who so dearly loved his land, to come and work for Matlakh? What forced you to become one of the landless and destitute?

Had I voiced aloud those questions, Semyon's reply would have run like this:

"Ivanko, my friend, you know the strength I've got. D'you think, Ivanko, that I hadn't enough wits to fix it up wi' the lawyer and get the land belonging to my wife's brothers in my own name? Or trade in maize? Or build a mill, if it came to that?—I could ha' built it wi' my own hands. I could ha' done all that, Ivanko, yet I couldn't. Conscience, eh, it's conscience!... I stood on this earth of ours and I looked to right and left—where could I use the strength o' my arms? It throbbed in my hands and

my heart, it cried to be used, but wherever I turned, I had to trample on the grief of others to reach fortune.

"When I got that letter to say my wife's brothers were coming back, Pan Lawyer said to me: 'Well, Rushchak, it's for you to say—if you tell me I'll fix the papers and you won't have to give them that land. Better do it before it's too late!'

"Maybe I should have shut my eyes and done it. Matlakh does worse than that and never blinks. . . . But I didn't. I couldn't, Ivanko. . . .

"Then another thing. There was land belonging to an orphan, and the executor sold it for debts. I had the money, I could ha' bought it. My wife, she kept at me: 'Buy it, it's no sin, the executor'll sell it just the same and never see the orphan's tears.' And even Vasilikha—it was her land—she came to us and said: 'Buy it, Semyon. Better for you to have it than Matlakh.' But I didn't buy it. I couldn't make myself do it. So Matlakh got it.

"I heard them afterwards in the inn call me a good-hearted fool.

"Then my wife's brothers came. I gave them their land and started struggling on my own bit. But you can't do much wi' a patch like that. So I've come to herd another man's cows on the upland pasture. That's the whole story, Ivanko. . . ."

From Semyon I learned how Gorulya was getting on, and through him I began sending money to Studenitsa. I asked Semyon to give it to Gafia and say nothing to Gorulya; knowing him, I was afraid that he would send it back.

Semyon had become morose and avoided people; he was surly when he talked to the boss, but he worked well, and was always eager to see me when I came, to tell me things he had noticed and find out something more about tending cattle.

The herd in Semyon's charge was thriving well. The

handsome slow-moving Swiss cows seemed to give endless quantities of milk, and Matlakh, whose hearty dislike for Semyon mingled with a none too groundless apprehension, was nevertheless compelled to hold him up as an example to the other men. It did not escape me that this praise was bitter as gall to Semyon. Only once, however, did he open his heart to me as he used to do in former years.

One of my visits coincided with Trinity Sunday. On that day the herdsmen always decorate their huts with green boughs, and shepherds tie leafy twigs to the horns of the sheep.

I had brought a bottle of plum brandy to celebrate.

Semyon as usual took me round the herd, showing me cow after cow, praising one, complaining of another and going into raptures over a third. He not only knew them all by name—he could tell me the weight of each and the amount of milk it gave.

When I had seen the stock, we sat down to the usual meagre herdsman's dinner.

The plum brandy did not make Semyon any more cheerful; on the contrary, it seemed only to add to his gloom.

"Folks think I'm trying to make up to Matlakh," he said. "Tell me, Ivanko, they do think it, don't they?"

"Nobody thinks anything of the kind," I said reassuringly.

"Nay, that's a lie," Semyon said, stubbornly shaking his head, heavy with the brandy. "I know what folks are saying, I kno-o-ow: 'Semyon Rushchak serves Matlakh because he wants to, not because he has to.' Aye, that's it! And there's none of 'em knows that Semyon Rushchak's torn in two. Now tell me yourself, Ivanko—how can I help doing well by such beauties?" His affectionate glance roved over the grazing herd. "Look at Mitsa, now. . . . Mitsa, Mitsa my beauty!"

The cow, hearing its name, raised a small, well-shaped head and stopped chewing.

"You said as I couldn't get more than four gallons o' milk from Mitsa," Semyon continued. "Didn't you say that?"

"Yes, I believe I did."

"And I started looking after her like she was a child, and I got six, every day six! And I'll get more. But why am I doing all this? I ought to let it alone, not bother myself. . . . But I can't. God! . . ." A spasm like that of physical pain passed over his face.

As I listened to Semyon I felt as though I myself were speaking, as though I heard my own voice and not Semyon's.

"Do you want me to kill Matlakh?" Semyon asked suddenly. "What, you're scared? Don't they kill gad-flies to stop them sucking the cows' blood? They kill 'em all right. . . . Gorulya was here yesterday."

"What did he come for?" I asked, startled.

"Oh, just a visit," answered Semyon and winked slyly. "He goes visiting all over Verkhovina now. Comes and talks to the folks and reads the paper. . . ." Then, apparently losing the thread of his thought as tipsy men do, he said: "Let's sing something, Ivanko." Without awaiting an answer, he began:

*Verkhovina, our land so dear,
How beautiful is all I see! . .*

I joined in, half closing my eyes.

I had intended to stay at the pasture until the next day, but in the early evening Matlakh turned up, unannounced as usual, and, learning that I was there, made a place for me in his trap and took me away with him. The son of the Veretski village elder had married that day, and Matlakh had been carousing at the wedding-feast;

his breath reeked of spirits and he was in a gay, boisterous mood.

Dusk began to fall. The mountain road was steep and winding, with sharp turns, but Matlakh kept shouting at the coachman: "Faster! We're not coming back from a funeral, thank God! Whip 'em up!" The coachman urged on the frisky horses and they galloped at breath-taking speed.

"Eh, that was a wedding, that was, Pan Belinets!" said Matlakh, as he clutched the wheels of the invalid-chair which he always took with him, fastened to the back of the trap. "A grand feast!" Puffing his reeking breath into my face, he suddenly asked: "And when's yours to be, eh? I heard as you've found yourself a good lass? But old Lembei's cutting up rough—eh?"

"Where did you hear all that?" I asked, unpleasantly surprised to find Matlakh so well informed.

"I heard it, I heard it," said Matlakh. "What's the odds where I heard it? Well, then, Father Novak—he's a good friend o' mine, and he told me. . . . But maybe the Spiritual Father was telling a lie?"

"No," I said unwillingly. "It's all true."

Matlakh threw himself back and guffawed.

"Eh, but he's a fool, your Lembei, devil take him! To talk about money when you're my agronomist, mine, Matlakh's! Did you ever hear the like? Why, we could buy up the old fool and all he's got!" Matlakh waved his arms. "And we'll do it! I won't have my agronomist treated wrong. What's it Lembei wants?" He turned to me and winked slyly. "Tell me, what does he want? A house? We'll build one! Choose your own place, get the builders. Băt'a builds houses for his engineers at Zlin, why can't I do the same by my agronomist? Băt'a in Zlin, and I in Uzhgorod!"

Matlakh's drunken boasting went on and on, his speech getting more and more disjointed, and at last his head fell sideways and he snored.

The next day a soberer Matlakh sent for me.

"Sit down," he said. "Let's get that business o' yours settled."

"Mine?" I repeated. "What business do you mean?"

"What we talked of yesterday."

I was still at a loss. I could remember nothing but drunken boasting.

Matlakh laughed complacently.

"I was drunk and I remember, you were sober and you've forgotten. . . . Well, never mind." With a change to seriousness, he continued: "I'm not going to sit quiet and see my agronomist put upon. You should ha' told me at once, you didn't act right. If I don't help you, my own man, then who will, I'm asking you? . . . Now listen to me. I'll speak to old Lembei myself as soon as I get to Uzhgorod, and we'll build a house, and I'll put down a deposit to the building firm for you, as my man, and keep back half your salary every month till it's paid."

All this was quite unexpected. The aid Matlakh offered removed all obstacles to my marriage, yet I felt no elation. I understood that Matlakh wanted to bind me to himself, he wanted to buy me as one buys an expensive beast. There was something alarming and horrible in the thought of being entangled in that sticky spider-web of dependence on someone I despised.

28

"Let us build you a happy home!

"Comfort, modern styles, quick service!

"'My home is my castle!' the English say.

"We agree with the English.

"Everything in this world is transient—success, politics, business; one thing alone is constant—the peace

and comforts of a home, the great solace of the family circle. Governments resign, states fall—it is no concern of yours. You have your home, your castle.

"Gentlemen—lawyers, doctors, professors, all who desire a home! The Kolena Brothers' building firm, Uzhgorod, is at your service.

"The latest in architecture and planning! The best fittings!"

Professional men in Uzhgorod found this advertising prospectus, colourfully illustrated on glossy paper, in their letter-boxes. Ruzhana and I had also received one, and after a lawyer had drawn up Matlakh's contract with me we sat studying it.

Ruzhana was transformed. The silent reserve which of late was evident even in her treatment of me, was gone, she grew eager and companionable, and was seriously concerned with her plans. It was clear that she was sincerely convinced of one thing: the road to our happiness lay through the sales-rooms of the Kolena Brothers' building firm.

I left it to Ruzhana to decide on the plan for our house. It was she who negotiated about a site and discussed all the building details with the firm. She set about it energetically. She was soon to escape from the oppressive atmosphere of the Lembei home, and she wanted to hasten that happy moment. Only one thing troubled and even irritated her—my indifference which sometimes verged on dislike for everything concerning the building of our house.

On Ruzhana's insistence, Father Novak was the first to cross the boundary of our plot on the day when the foundation-stone was laid.

About a month ago the priest had returned from a trip he had made to Rome, where he was graciously received by his Holiness, the Pope, whose blessing he earned. It was the latter circumstance that made Father Novak rise

even higher in the estimation of his parishioners, though none knew what lay behind the Pope's blessing.

Thin, stooped, his robes rustling, Father Novak walked slowly round the foundation-pit, stopping to say a prayer at each corner. He was followed by Szabo wheeling Mat-lakh in his chair. Then came Ruzhana and I, old Lembei, Chonka, who had already managed to get a drink or two somewhere, his wife, and a few guests.

When the ceremony was over and a mason had taken from Ruzhana the foundation-stone and set it in place, Ruzhana passed wine round to the guests. The priest took his wine-glass and, holding it in both hands, pronounced the words:

"Father Almighty, All-Merciful and All-Powerful, we pray Thee to grant peace and Thy blessing to this house, to preserve those beneath its roof from pride and the temptations of the Evil One. May their hearts be filled with humility and faith in the blessedness of the trials which Thou sendest down upon the earth."

"Amen," said Chonka quickly and raised his glass to his lips; a reproving glance from Julia stopped him short, and with a sigh he reluctantly lowered the glass again. Everybody pretended not to have noticed anything, and Novak, after a pause, turned to me and continued:

"Life has been granted us in troublous times. Men harken to the Enemy and scoff at the sacred Church, they preach false teachings, they sow discord and violence and whisper among themselves that man is all-powerful. But man is weak and devoid of power, his body is but the temporary habitation of his soul, as life upon earth is but a fleeting instant preceding the eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. May this house be your refuge from all vanities, a stronghold amidst the raging sea."

I listened to the priest and caught myself thinking: "Essentially, that's just like the Kolena Brothers' adver-

tisement. Could it be that Father Novak wrote it for them?"

I glanced at Ruzhana. She was standing on Novak's right, a model of respectful attention, but something in her face told me that she was only pretending to listen, that in reality she was far away, dreaming of our future happiness.

My own thoughts took wings and I suddenly saw Ruzhana and myself—not here with Father Novak, Julia and Matlakh, but in Studenitsa, with Gorulya and Gafia. . . . I felt a poignant longing for my own people, I realized how dear Gorulya was to me, and everything about me seemed more trivial, shameful and sordid than ever.

The Father ended his homily and congratulations followed. The first glass of wine was followed by a second and a third.

Ruzhana was sparkling with animation. "Isn't it all lovely?" her eyes said when they met mine. "Isn't it all wonderful? What more could anybody want?"

Had Ruzhana been able to read my thoughts, she would have known that I was not there, I was far, far away.

29

It was a Sunday when Ruzhana and I arrived in Studenitsa. I had been restless and agitated during the journey, and Ruzhana kept looking at me uneasily.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Are you afraid they won't like me?"

"Of course I'm not!" I said indignantly. "They can't help liking you! I'm thinking about something else."

How could I explain to Ruzhana that for me there were two Studenitsas—the one that was associated with Matlakh, with my present life of servitude, and the other—

the Studenitsa of my childhood which I had left, and to which I felt I had lost all right. How could I explain to her that every day I felt more deeply my guilt in having abandoned that second Studenitsa? This was what tormented me incessantly.

The cart going our way which I had hired in Volovets took us to the edge of the village. I picked up the knapsack with the gifts for Gorulya and Gafia and led Ruzhana to the familiar cottage by the uphill path instead of through the village.

Gorulya was not at home. Gafia was so taken aback at the sight of us that she covered her mouth with the hem of her black shawl and stared as though she had never seen me before.

"Ivanko," she said at last, "it's you?" and began to cry. The tears trickled down her haggard face and hollow cheeks, and she wiped the bright drops away with her fingers.

I put my arms round her and she pressed her head against my shoulder, whispering: "If only you knew . . . if only you knew. . . ."

She kept repeating the words, unable to express all that she wanted to say.

It was only when we entered the cottage that Gafia seemed to notice that I was not alone. She wiped her cheeks with the hem of her shawl and her face took on a distant look. She cast a cautious, mistrustful glance at Ruzhana and a questioning one at me.

"We've come to see you, Mother," I said. "This is Ruzhana."

"Your wife?" she asked slowly.

"Not yet," I said. "But she will be if you say so."

Ruzhana smiled shyly, and Gafia flung up her hands and began bustling about the room, repeating all the time: "Eh, good people, and what a way to do! . . . Standing there, without a word that it's your betrothed you've

come with. . . . But sit down, sit you down. . . . Eh, what a way to do, and not a word could you say!"

All the time she was moving things from place to place, dusting the already spotlessly clean bench a dozen times with her apron, pushing Gorulya's shoes into a corner and for some reason pulling them out again; then she suddenly stopped, went quietly up to Ruzhana, drew her down beside her on the bench and stroked her shoulder gently.

"Why couldn't you let me know you were coming, Ivanko?" she said. "I'd ha' been able to get something ready, and. . ." her voice dropped, "I wouldn't ha' let Ilko go off anywhere."

"Where is he? On the upland pasture?" I asked.

"Nay, he's not there," said Gafia. "Three days ago he slept at home and just at dawn someone from town came knocking at the door. My old man, he talked and talked wi' him and then they went off somewhere together. But it wasn't to the uplands, Ivanko. When he goes there he always tells me."

Gafia rose and began busying herself about the house. Ruzhana offered to help her.

"Nay, nay, there's no call for it," Gafia protested. "I'll do it myself, sit you down."

Nevertheless, it was clear that she found Ruzhana's help very agreeable. In a little while I heard the two of them catching a chicken somewhere behind the cottage, and then they went to the spring together.

I let my eyes rove round the cottage. Nothing had changed. Everything was as bare, neat and clean as it had always been. Among other pictures there was one of Lenin cut from a newspaper. But then I noticed under the pictures, on a carved chest, a small pile of books covered with a runner. I went up to the chest, lifted the cloth and began looking at the books. They were all paper-backed, and their creased and dog-eared look

was enough to show that they had passed through many hands. One of the books particularly caught my attention. Slowly, carefully, I began turning page after page with that strange feeling that comes over a man when he unexpectedly finds himself faced with something great and very significant.

Gafia entered and threw down a pile of wood by the stove. Ruzhana followed her carrying a bucket, the water splashing gently in it. Her sleeves were rolled up, her hair was coming down, and her eyes shone as though they had caught the merry sparkle of the spring.

"Well, did you mind being left to yourself?" asked Ruzhana gaily. "Come along down to the spring! It's lovely there! The water's so clear and cold!"

"No, I think I'll wait here," I said with a smile, then turning to Gafia, I asked: "Whose books are these?"

"Whose? Why, they're Ilko's," she said sighing. "He used to teach you, and now he's started on books himself. When he's home he has the lamp burning half the night. Some of the books are all right, you can understand them at once. There was one he read me, it said over there in Russia they've started living quite different; but there's others, Ilko sits and sits there wi' his head in his hands, eh, I get right sorry for him. 'Is it hard, Ilko?' I ask him and he says: 'Aye, it's hard, but I've got to read it. I'll read it ten times if need be,' he says, 'but I'll understand it, and when I do, Gafia,' he says, 'it'll be like turning up the wick of that lamp over there inside me.'"

Ruzhana came up and looked with curiosity over my shoulder.

"Stalin," she read slowly, and repeated: "Stalin..."

Nobody disturbed me, Ruzhana and Gafia talked in whispers. I sat down on the bench by the window, my head propped on my hands, the book open before me on the table. It was entitled *The Foundations of Leninism* and contained a collection of lectures that Stalin had de-

livered in Moscow, in the Sverdlov Communist University. I read on without stopping, even when I came across something that was not clear to me. I knew that if I did not understand, it was because these places touched upon an unfamiliar side of life in a huge country, a life quite different from the one we lived. And as I read further, that great life seemed to open up before me with its struggles, its mighty aims, and the roads to their attainment.

Now and then Ruzhana came and sat down beside me on the bench for a minute or two, saying nothing.

"You're not angry with me, are you?" I asked on one of these occasions, without raising my eyes from the book.

"No, no," she said quickly, shaking her head, then peering at the book, she asked: "What's it about, Ivanko?"

"A lot of things," I answered, "and perhaps the most important thing in life."

"Could I understand any of it?"

"I think you could."

"The most important thing," Ruzhana repeated my words. "I've wanted to know for a long time what really is the most important thing in life. . . ."

Ruzhana said no more. She sat for a few moments in silence, then left me, and I was soon absorbed in my reading again.

At about midday Gafia came running into the cottage.

"Oh, Ivanko," she called, "*Vuiku's* coming!" There was mingled alarm and entreaty in her eyes.

"Son, son, be careful," she whispered, pressing my arm, "don't say anything if. . . . I know he's been fretting for you. . . . Let's have it all quiet, without any quarrelling, like decent folk. . . ."

I bent down and peered out of the window; Gorulya was coming up the path from the valley. His step was weary, but from the free swing of his arms I knew that

he was coming home in a cheerful mood. My heart began to beat fast.

Gafia and Ruzhana went out to meet Gorulya in the yard. I could hear their voices through the open porch door, but could not distinguish the words. The minutes dragged slowly, like a clock running down. I waited. The voices had stopped, but there were no footsteps and no Gorulya. Was he hesitating like myself? Was he talking to Gafia? I made a great effort and had already taken a step forward when the porch darkened as the light from outside was blocked and Gorulya, stooping, entered the cottage. The dust of the road lay white on his eyebrows, his hat and his blunt-nosed strapped shoes.

"Good day, *Vuiku*," I said.

"Good day to you, Ivanko," he answered.

"Can't you let us get into the room?" came Gafia's voice in mock anger from behind Gorulya. "You're blocking the whole doorway!"

Gorulya quickly moved aside, making way for Gafia and Ruzhana.

"Always tramping off somewhere, and here we've got folks waiting for you," Gafia went on, helping him off with his jacket.

"If I'd known we'd got visitors like these, I'd ha' asked the Mother o' God for a pair o' wings," Gorulya answered.

"She'll have to wait a long time till you ask anything from her," said Gafia with a sigh. "I thought you wouldn't come home today either."

"Nay, wife, that's enough scolding. You'll be teaching this young lady bad ways."

Ruzhana smiled, but Gafia was not to be put off.

"Do her no harm, let her learn," she said good-humouredly, taking Gorulya's dusty hat. "Maybe she'll be needing it one o' these days."

Gorulya shrugged his shoulders.

"Eh, is that what you need to teach young folks? Better teach them how to keep love alight, so it'll warm their lives and give happiness to themselves and other folks too. That's what you need to teach them!"

"But is that something one can learn?" said Ruzhana, looking at Gorulya in some surprise. She had not expected words like that here. "There isn't a great deal of love like that," she added with a sigh.

"Aye, there isn't much, that's right," Gorulya agreed. "But d'you think it's because folks don't want it that way? They don't get a chance to love like that! They're worn out with poverty, dirtied with money and sold out like brandy at the inn there!"

Gorulya limped across the room in his homespun shirt and sat down on the bench. It was obvious that he had walked a long way and was very tired, but the thoughts filling his mind gave him new energy.

"Aye, you can learn it," he said after a short pause. "But first life's got to be made different.... Life's all upside down, it's got to be set on its feet so it can move freely.... And for a life like that and love like that we could take a glass o' something, what d'you say, Gafia?"

Gafia hurried to lay the table, all the time eyeing Gorulya and me, ready at any moment, I felt, to intervene in my defence.

Gorulya took down a towel from the nail and went out into the yard to wash. I followed him, carrying a bucket of water and a wooden pitcher.

"All right, pour the water for old times' sake," said Gorulya, placing his hands under the pitcher.

Cordial as Gorulya was, however, I could feel that there was a barrier between us, one difficult to cross.

At table Gorulya talked mainly to Ruzhana. He told her about the upland pastures, about his wanderings, and Gafia's apprehensions calmed somewhat. But I felt all the time that all this outward friendliness concealed a

great inner tension, and every now and then I caught him giving me a quick, probing glance.

"Will Gorulya say anything about what's happened to me?" The thought gave me no peace. "Will he say anything about my working for Matlakh, or will he keep quiet so as not to spoil this day?"

I began it. It was after dinner when we went out for a smoke.

"*Vuiku*," I said, "we've got to have a talk."

The lighted match Gorulya was holding halted half-way to his pipe and burned out.

"All right, we'll talk, Ivanko. Tell me how you've been living all this time."

I concealed nothing from Gorulya, I told him everything that had happened from the day when I left Studenitsa, all that I had gone through and all that I had thought since we had last met. Gorulya listened without interrupting, although he already knew much of it, and had guessed more.

"Eh, Ivanko," he said sadly when I finished. "Wasn't it the truth we told you, Kurtinets and I? . . . Well, now you can see for yourself how they've got it all fixed!" His lips twisted in a bitter smile under his moustache. "That's a dish that's all right till you start to eat it. What's the good of them calling you a man of learning? We've got to get freedom for the common folks like they've got it in Russia, and then your science'll be free tool. . . . Well, and what about Matlakh?" he asked dully after a pause.

"I'm working for him."

"I've seen that."

"What else could I do?"

"I'm not blaming you, you'd nowhere else to go! But if you sell your soul to him, if you let him hire that too—then I'll blame you all right! . . . I've heard tell Matlakh's building a house for you. Is that right?"

I flared up.

"It's easy enough for him to build it on my own money!"

"Is that the way of it?" said Gorulya, with a puzzled frown.

"He's keeping back half my salary and five per cent interest."

"A-a-ah! He knows all about it, he learned in America how to get folks all tied up. Take care, Ivanko, he may come between us yet... maybe he's done it already...."

"Never!" I cried hotly. "Why, you see I've come to you, *Vuiku*."

Gorulya took his pipe from his mouth and thought a moment.

"Nay, Ivanko," he said sternly. "You haven't come yet, not for good...."

30

Ruzhana asked Gorulya to take her to the upland pastures. He agreed willingly, and at dawn they set out.

I longed to go with them, but I felt that Gorulya and I might find each other's company a strain, that the previous day's talk had not really cleared everything up between us. So I made the excuse of business at the dairy-farm and remained in Studenitsa.

Early the next morning I set out for Matlakh's house.

As I approached the gate it opened as though to let me in, and two cars shot out into the village street. They turned towards Volovets and disappeared in a cloud of white dust.

"Who's that so early?" I asked the old watchman by the gate.

"It's gentry from town," he answered, pushing the gate to with his shoulder. "They came when it was hardly light."

"What did they come for, do you know, Grandad?"

"I don't know, sir, but there was a lot o' noise and bawling in the house."

I crossed the big yard and climbed the steps to the porch. Through the closed door I could hear shouting and cursing somewhere inside. I stopped irresolutely—should I go in, or should I wait a little? But the shouting and cursing did not stop, on the contrary it grew louder, and I could recognize Matlakh's voice. I pushed the door open, went along the passage and entered the big room which served as an office. It was an amazing sight that met me.

Matlakh was driving his wheeled chair wildly about the room, cursing at the top of his voice. His eyes, blood-shot and protruding with rage, stared unseeingly. The broken pieces of a stick lay on the floor.

"They couldn't get it done!" he raved hoarsely. "The fools, the idiots, they had it all in their own hands and let it slip!"

"But what could they do, Petro?" pleaded a man in the short overcoat worn by rich farmers. He was sitting on the edge of a chair as close to the door as he could get. His face was red and drops of sweat stood out on his forehead.

Matlakh was not to be appeased.

"Shut up!" he bawled, waving his hands about. "You're not fit to be an elder, you're not even fit to pluck chickens!" A string of curses followed, such as I had never yet heard.

Suddenly Matlakh's eyes fell upon me.

"Ah, so it's you, Pan Belinets!" he bawled. "Glad, are you? It's all your Gorulya! . . . Gorulya, Gorulya! . . ." He beat the arms of his chair with such force that it seemed ready to collapse under him.

"What's the matter, Pan Matlakh?" I asked curtly.

Matlakh did not even hear me. He started driving his chair about the room again in a frenzy, bumping into the walls and the furniture.

It was plain that this was no time for discussing business, so I turned and went. I had to saddle a horse and go to look at the clover which had been sown a little distance away from the place where the dairy-farm was being built.

Somebody in the yard called me. I turned and saw Semyon Rushchak. He was carrying oilcakes out of the barn and loading them on a cart.

"Have you been in there?" asked Semyon, jerking his head towards the house.

"Yes."

"Hasn't he burst yet, Matlakh? He's been bellowing for hours."

"What's happened?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard?"

"No. Nothing. I went in and found Matlakh raving like a lunatic. There's some elder sitting there, sweating."

"That's the elder from Medvyanoye," Semyon told me.

"What's Medvyanoye got to do with it?"

"That's where it all happened yesterday," Semyon answered calmly. "Aye, that Medvyanoye's given him a nasty knock!"

From accounts by Gorulya, Kurtinets and many others, and Matlakh's testimony in court in our own day, I now have a clear picture not only of the events in Medvyanoye, but of what preceded them.

It all began after Hitler seized power in Germany. Three years had passed since then and on the surface everything in Czechoslovakia appeared to be the same. But every day it became clearer what the plans of German fascism were, and the demand of the reactionary parties and their newspapers that the country be saved from Bolshevism and that the Communist Party be banned,

became more insistent. Communists were hounded more fiercely, and Henlein's Nazi party of Sudeten Germans raised its head.

One day when Matlakh was in Uzhgorod, several gentlemen gathered in his hotel rooms. There were Pan Pospíšil, a journalist for the official government paper, who had come from Prague; Revai, a Social-Democratic leader in our region; Augustin Voloshin himself, the bellicose Uniate priest who led the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists, a man with a foxy face and sharp eyes peering through glasses; and finally, Father Novak sitting quietly aside from the others but listening attentively to what they were saying.

Here is the story of the life and deeds of this man.

Stefan Novak, in his youth known as Stefan Balog, was heir to vast forests and vineyards. He was the eldest son, and a great favourite of his father, a hard-hearted, ruthless man, who wanted Stefan to succeed him on the land.

Stefan, on the other hand, who had got his early education at Budapest, felt inclined towards politics. It was useless, however, to oppose his father's wishes. Thus, outwardly at least, he submitted to the life mapped out for him. He even began taking an interest in the affairs of his father, but, having become infected with liberal ideas at Budapest, he regarded his father's methods far too crude, old-fashioned and direct. He realized that it was necessary to be more subtle, and not to antagonize, to the extent his father did, the "petty forces" which Stefan, in his heart of hearts, hated and despised no less than old Balog.

There were repercussions of the Russian Revolution of 1905 in our Carpathian Mountains. A wave of strikes and demonstrations in token of solidarity with our Russian brothers swept Uzhgorod, Mukachevo and the salt mines of Solotvino. Peasants were setting fire to land-

owners' estates. The farm-labourers near Sevlyush tried to burn down Balog's estate. Government troops, however, arrived in time to extinguish the fire, but too late to save Balog, whom the peasants killed. The uprisings of the workers and peasants were cruelly suppressed. A period of "peacemaking" set in. To Stefan Balog, however, it was clear that the "peacemaking" was illusory, and that the hatred of the wood-cutters, farm-hands and villagers, with whom he now had direct dealings, was stronger than ever. It was then that he turned from the idea of a secular politician's career and decided to devote himself to church politics.

Thus, one fine day he declared that he was disowning the inheritance, so cruelly acquired by his father, in favour of his younger brother; he also gave up his father's name, changing it to Novak, his mother's maiden name.

These actions made a profound impression on all strata of society; and in the villages they began to speak of Novak as of a man who was leading a righteous and even saintly life.

Novak was ordained after several years of preparation for the priesthood in Rome. Later, he served in the Papal College which had charge of affairs in our country and in Galicia. However, his preoccupation with "holy" matters did not prevent Novak from taking a keen interest in the inheritance bequeathed to his younger brother. To tell the truth, he remained, as formerly, the possessor of the wealth he inherited, and with great caution, lest someone learn of it, assisted his brother to augment it.

Father Novak did not return to his native parts until 1920. He came then as one of the retinue of Grigory Zhatkovich, Sub-Carpathia's first governor, appointed to the post by President Wilson.

Novak could easily have held an important or perhaps even the highest office in the episcopacy, but his

ambition lay in a different direction. A true servant of the Vatican, he saw the salvation of human souls from the "red peril" as his mission. Thus, he had not come to his native country to don a bishop's robes, but, at first, holding the modest post of a teacher at a seminary, and later, as a mere parish priest, to be the eyes and ears of the Vatican in Sub-Carpathian Rus. Covertly, through some who served him in fear and others in devotion, he interfered in many spheres of the life of our country. While hating fanatically all that threatened to shake the order of society from which he stemmed, he professed himself a democrat, thinking that the wisest course.

"Yes," Novak admitted long afterwards, "I was a covert politician. However, when I saw that all our clandestine efforts proved of no avail, that, though the democratic freedoms had been granted, daily and monthly more and more citizens were being converted to the teachings of Communism, I considered it my sacred duty to engage openly in politics."

One day, unexpectedly for his parishioners, Father Novak departed for Rome.

Upon his return, a month later, he declared himself a supporter of the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists. This was something of a surprise to all who knew Novak. Matlakh, in the habit of paying calls on Novak whenever business took him to Uzhgorod, said with feigned innocence: "I never reckoned, Father Novak, that you could be a nationalist."

"What do you think I should be then?" Novak asked coolly.

"Well, one of the agrarians."

"The Agrarian party is powerless in the struggle against the false teachings of the Communists," Novak replied. "Nationalism, on the other hand, is the only antidote against the Communists. When you say to a man: you belong to a superior nation or race, it intoxicates him,

it turns his head. Nationalism, my son, saved Germany from the Reds; indeed, it alone is destined to rid the world of them."

One of the newly-fledged leaders of the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists, Augustin Voloshin, was sitting in Matlakh's hotel rooms.

The conversation turned to the growing uneasiness in the republic and the alarm caused by Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia.

"Of course," said Pospišil, "Hitler has got claims on our country. In fact, it may not stop at the Sudetenland. But—nothing's been said officially yet, and then, one can always come to some agreement! We have to think about a more dangerous symptom—I am referring, gentlemen, to the tendency to seek closer relations with Moscow. The number of people who support this idea is growing day by day. I recently returned from a trip to the United States where I had the honour of meeting very highly placed persons who are carefully watching everything that happens here, and they drew my attention to just this danger."

"But wait a minute!" Revai observed. "Roosevelt, the new President, himself favours a rapprochement with the Russians!"

"Presidents come and presidents go," said Pospišil very significantly. "And you must remember the Communists there are fortunately not as strong as they are here."

"Now look you here, gentlemen," Matlakh broke in. "It's all one to me whether it's Beneš or Hitler or somebody else, so long as he's got a firm hand and business is good."

"I must request you, Pan Matlakh," said Revai briding, "not to bracket Hitler and President Beneš together in our presence."

"Words!" said Matlakh with a wave of the hand. "If we're going to play hide-and-seek wi' each other we won't

get far. I'll have nothing against Pan Beneš if you can tell me just one thing—can he shut the Communists up once and for all, as Hitler's done in Germany, or can he not?"

"Of course he can, and, what is most important, he must!" Father Novak, who had so far not uttered a word, suddenly put in firmly. "We stand on the brink of an abyss and what alone can prevent us with the help of the Almighty from falling into it is—fire and sword against the Communists, fire and sword! However, the government and the President must hear not only the members of parliament and party leaders, but the voice of the people themselves, asking to rid them of the Communists."

"Exactly, exactly," the journalist chimed in, "you've taken the words out of my mouth, Father Novak, I was just going to say the very same thing: get the voice of the people and success is assured."

"And if the people are Communists themselves—what then?" asked Matlakh, his eyes narrowing.

"That's slander against the people!" said Voloshin pompously.

"Eh, Pan Father," Matlakh said sniggering, "don't play hide-and-seek, you know well enough how the elections go. Who gets the most votes—you or the Communists?"

"Yes, that is true," sighed Pospišil. "We must have the courage to face facts. Unfortunately, the Communists have many supporters, and in spite of all restrictions, their influence is particularly strong here, in this region. That is the reason, Pan Matlakh, why everything should start from here, from the citadel of these trouble-makers. We," and his eyes travelled round the other faces, "are men of different parties but we have decided to join forces. And knowing, Pan Matlakh, that you are one of the most influential farmers in Verkhovina, we have come to you too. We all want the same thing."

"What I want," said Matlakh, "is to have law and order, and make the Communists shut their mouths."

It was late when the visitors left, very pleased with themselves and with the plot they had hatched. It was a cunning one and very much after Matlakh's own heart. As soon as he got back to Studenitsa he began to act.

Whether Matlakh himself let something slip, or whether his agents were incautious, is not known, but Gorulya and his comrades noticed a good deal of mysterious coming and going by Matlakh and the rich farmers of the district, and began looking into the matter. And then one fine day Gorulya visited Kurtinets in Mukachevo.

"Have you heard, Olexa, what's going on? Eh? Heard nothing about it yet?" said Gorulya quickly, hardly waiting for Kurtinets to take him into the room and close the door. "Sit down and listen to what we've found out our way. They're going to call the folks to an assembly."

"Who are? What folks?" asked Kurtinets, moving his chair closer to Gorulya.

"Why, the agrarians are—Matlakh, and I think Voloshin's in it too. And who are they calling? The poorest peasants in our region. They're trying to get Fyodor Skripka to go, and telling him they'll cancel his back taxes if he does. But the thing is this, Olexa, they want to make the folks at that assembly sign a paper written to the President against our Party, and they want 'em to get the other districts to have assemblies like that too."

"So that's it." Kurtinets frowned and rose. "Yes, it's clever, it's a clever trick all right! And it's not the big farmers they're calling, but the poor men. 'Look, Pan President,' they'll say, 'the poor men want the Communist Party banned!' And I suppose they're choosing the ones with arrears of taxes like a millstone round their necks?"

"That's just the ones!" Gorulya broke out.

Kurtinets paced up and down the room.

"Where will they meet, and when?"

"I haven't found out yet. But there's talk that it may be next week in Medvyanoye."

"Medvyanoye?" Kurtinets repeated. "They've chosen a good place."

"Aye, you're right there," Gorulya agreed gloomily. "That's where they're strong—they've got a grip on everything!" With a sudden change he burst out: "But we'll stop that assembly! We'll find out who the delegates are, we'll go to every one o' them and get 'em not to go. Not one of them'll show up, you'll see!"

The thought of difficult work ahead seemed to infuse new life into Gorulya and he was eager to start. He looked at Kurtinets, expecting approval, and was sorely disappointed when the latter said: "The assembly must take place, Ilko, we mustn't stop it on any account. I think the Regional Committee will agree with me."

"How's that?" Gorulya jumped up, but Kurtinets laid a hand on his shoulder and pressed him back into his chair.

"Don't get excited and don't be in a hurry. What good will it do if we prevent the assembly? They'll just organize another somewhere else. Isn't that right?"

"I suppose so," Gorulya conceded unwillingly. "What are we to do then—stand aside and say our prayers?"

"No," said Kurtinets. "We've got to be at that assembly too."

Gorulya gave a wry laugh.

"See them letting us in!"

"It's their job to keep us out, and it's ours to get in."

... The assembly actually was arranged at Medvyanoye, one of the most isolated Verkhovina villages, which was ruled absolutely by Andrei Kazarik, the elder, brother of the same Kazarik who ran the *Independent Weekly*.

The people were to gather in the inn on Sunday. On

Saturday evening newspapermen arrived from Uzhgorod and even from Prague, accompanied by two tax officials who right there on the spot were to give papers to the villagers who arrived, cancelling their arrears of taxes. Leshchetsky too came, in the night, secretly, with a representative of the Social-Democratic party. They went to the elder's house and stayed there, concealed, so that nobody could say that the assembly was not spontaneous. For the same reason, Matlakh stopped at home—the rich farmers were ostensibly to take no part.

Early on Sunday morning the "delegates" began to arrive. Nobody had elected them, but to make up for that, they had been very carefully hand-picked by Matlakh and his agents. These were men driven by want to a state of dumb despair. They were worse off than paupers, who can awaken in the morning with the hope of finding some odd job or getting a hand-out. They had no hope at all. Hungry, weighed down with taxes, they yet clung to their tiny strips of land; that land did not feed them, it only drained their last strength, but nevertheless to them it was *their* land, and they felt that they owned something.

Now these "farmers" came from their villages to the assembly at Medvyanoye, without even knowing exactly why they had been called together. Only one thing drew them there—the promise that those crushing arrears would be cancelled; for that they would have gone to the end of the world.

Peering through a small misty window looking out on the Medvyanoye village square, Gorulya saw Fyodor Skripka of Studenitsa, Vasil Yurchuk of Potoki and Mikhailo Lemak of Chorny going to the inn. They were met at the door by some brisk men who asked them something and only then did they let them in.

Gorulya, Kurtinets and František Stupa, who had come from Prague to join them, had been in Medvyanoye three days. Stupa was a bold, unusually gifted man, a

lawyer who was also widely known as one of the best writers in the republic. Most of his novels were about our region, which Stupa knew very well. Every summer he came to the mountains, lived with the wood-cutters and shepherds and tramped over the whole district. In the villages the people treated him as one of their own and were always glad to see him.

In spite of his fame as a novelist, Stupa still practised law. He had his office in Prague, and defended most of the cases brought against Communists. Judges and prosecutors, upon learning that Stupa had undertaken the defence, were always nervous.

Stupa was an old friend of Kurtinets', and he was there with the intention of sending a dispatch to the *Rude Pravo*. They had not come by the road, but over the mountains, by roundabout hunters' paths known to Gorulya, and were staying with the blacksmith, who knew everything. Nobody in the village had any suspicion that the blacksmith had visitors. They themselves, however, were kept informed about all that was happening in Medvyanoye; they even knew that bottles of spirits and plates of bread and pork stood on the tables in the inn, and that the innkeeper warned each delegate as he arrived: "That's for after the assembly, good people. As soon as it's over you can eat and drink all you want."

Kurtinets and Gorulya got all their information from the blacksmith's twelve-year-old daughter Mariika, who worked for the innkeeper's wife as nursemaid, a quick and smart girl. The last time she ran over to them was at about midday. "There's a priest come to Vaskol!" she cried. (Vasko was the innkeeper.) "He's sitting in the master's room, and the elder's with him!"

Gorulya and Kurtinets exchanged glances.

"What's he like, that priest?" Kurtinets asked.

"He's tall and thin like," Mariika said. "And he's got

a little face—" she held her two fists together,—"little like that!"

"Novak!" said Kurtinets. "It's Voloshin's tub-thumper, none other! Preaching in church isn't enough for him, he's started on politics. They always send him wherever they think it's going to be hot."

"That's going to make it a bit more difficult, isn't it?" asked František Stupa in Czech. He was sitting on the bench, one foot tucked under him, reading a book.

"Aye, it's not so good," Gorulya shook his head.

"We couldn't expect anything less," said Kurtinets.

"Don't get discouraged, Comrades!" said Stupa. "The better a fortress is defended, the more satisfaction when it is taken! And we shall take it!" He slid his foot down from the bench, put his book into his pocket, looked through his glasses at Mariika, and said: "Are there many people there?"

"It's full up," she said. "There's no room for any more."

"Will there be room for us, though?"

The girl nodded and re-arranged her kerchief.

"You're not afraid, Mariika?" Kurtinets asked.

"Nay," she answered. "My Pa always tells me not to be feared of anything."

Kurtinets and Stupa smiled, and Mariika smiled back at them.

The inn certainly was packed. People sat crowded together on the benches behind the tables, stretching their necks to hear what a tall man in a tightly-buttoned broad-cloth frock-coat was saying. It was Father Novak, Augustin Voloshin's tub-thumper. He was standing with his hands resting on the back of a chair in front of the bar, where the presidium chosen by the assembly had replaced the innkeeper.

Fyodor Skripka evidently felt ill at ease, sitting there between the Medvyanoye elder and some gentleman from

the town. He held himself as erect as he could and tried to look important, but it was rather difficult, because he could not take his eyes off the tax officials sitting at a separate table. And Fyodor Skripka was not the only one looking in their direction.

Ledgers and a pile of papers handed in by the delegates lay on the table in front of the officials. Each time one of them reached out to pick up a slip and enter something in the ledger, Skripka's heart leaped. "Is that mine? Or maybe he's not come to mine yet?"

To get rid of those arrears that weighed him down—what would he not have given for it! Yet at the same time he had a vague, uneasy, shamed feeling. "Oh, Mother of God," the old man whispered, and, wearied with inner struggle, would lapse into a stupor.

Novak's voice gained strength, he could be heard even by the guards whom Kazarik had placed outside the door.

"My brethren, today I have come not to call you to repentance, or to give you comfort, but to place a sword in your hands. Yes, a sword!" he repeated, as a stir passed through the audience. "A sword which with the blessing of the Holy Pope you must today bring down upon the heads of false friends. There is nothing and nobody more dangerous for man than a false friend. Better the rage of an open enemy than his smile, better his threats than his promises. And if you ask me—who are these false friends from whom we must save ourselves, I reply—" the priest paused,—*"the Communists!"*

Again there was a rustle as people moved in their seats. Even Skripka stopped watching the officials and stared at Novak's wrinkled, shaved neck.

"Were it not for the Communists," Novak continued, "we Ukrainians would long ago have had autonomy, and our government in its wisdom would have found a way to relieve the people of poverty and want. Peace and

concord would have reigned among us, brother would not have raised his hand against brother, neighbour against neighbour."

The elder sitting beside Skripka coughed, and, as though a command had been given, a thin villager popped up in a far corner.

"Them's true words, Spiritual Father!" he cried. "The Communists make fools of us! We must stop it!"

Skripka saw the elder nod, and at once the villager popped down again and disappeared.

"Yes, my brethren, we must stop it!" Novak caught up the words. "Many have already understood this, let us join our voices to theirs with the blessing of the Holy Father. Let us tell Pan President and the government that we demand a ban on the Communist Party!"

"It's high time!" another voice came in on the beat, followed by a third, somewhat more confident now: "Maybe it really would be better without the Communists?"

"Try it!" somebody else retorted. "Who takes our part when we're put upon?"

Novak cast a surprised glance at the elder. Kazarik himself was startled. He jumped up, knocked on the table three times with his hand and shouted: "Quiet! Quiet, please! You're hindering the officials with your noise!" He jerked his head at the men with the ledgers. "What if you make them get something wrong?"

The elder's practised hand had taken the reins, and the noise died down at once, giving place to an awkward, oppressive silence. Fyodor Skripka even closed his eyes. The silence was soon broken, however. Muffled voices sounded. The elder, Skripka, everybody sitting behind the bar turned to the curtained doorway leading to the living-quarters of the inn. People rose and peered over each other's heads to see what was happening. The elder jumped up and made a dash for the door, but he was

too late. Kurtinets, Gorulya and František Stupa were already in the room.

"Who are you?" cried the elder, trying to bar their way. "You can't come in here!"

"Why not?" Kurtinets smiled grimly as he put Kazarik aside. "The talk's about us, so we've come to hear it."

"Pan Deputy!" Novak had recognized Kurtinets. His face was purple and his jaw shook with rage. "You have not been invited. You must go."

"Pan Father," answered Kurtinets. "I shall go only if the master tells me. And it is not you who are master here, or the elder, or the innkeeper, *there* is the master—the people!"

Turning to the silent but alert villagers, Kurtinets took off his hat.

"Good health to you all!"

"God give you good health!"

"I ask you to allow me and my comrades to remain. It is for you to say."

An uneasy silence followed. Then whispering began.

"Better not, we can do without them," said some.

"Maybe it wouldn't be so bad to have 'em, at that," said others. "Let them stop, we know 'em well enough. . . ."

The "delegates" were bewildered and confused. They were torn two ways—they were desperately anxious to get rid of the tax arrears, but at the same time it was hard to look the new-comers in the eye. After all, say what you would, when disaster or injustice struck them, there was no need to send for the Communists—they came themselves. When the executors tried their high-handed tricks, who stood out against them? When somebody had to speak out boldly—who did it? The Communists! And then, too, people had not forgotten 1919, when the Communists had divided the gentry's land among the villagers; eh, what a good time that was! . . .

Kurtinets waited patiently; he could understand the turmoil in their minds.

"I know that we're not welcome guests here," he said at last. "But let's be fair. We Communists are on trial, and have you ever heard of a trial with the defendants kept out?"

"This isn't a trial, Pan Deputy!" said Novak loudly.

"Yes, it is," Kurtinets answered. "And since you have chosen the part of prosecutor, it's our turn to speak."

"Aye, he's right at that," said several voices. "Give 'em fair play!"

"We've heard one, we want to hear the other."

Men moved and crowded together to make room for the new-comers.

All this time Kazarik had been standing in helpless confusion, but now he recovered his wits.

"The assembly cannot continue!" he shouted. "I close the meeting!"

"Don't you be in such a hurry," Gorulya cut him short. "That's not for you to say. We've got to ask them as is the master here. Now, good folks! It's my idea we shouldn't close the meeting, we should go on with it, since the case isn't settled yet."

"Go on! Go on!" The shouts came from all parts of the room.

The elder tried every trick, Father Novak stormed and threatened the wrath of God, but it was all no good; the people were determined.

"Get on with the meeting!" Fyodor Skripka shouted more loudly than any.

Novak and Kazarik had been whispering together, and now they suddenly changed their tactics. They called for order, took their places in the presidium, and Kazarik as chairman even gave the floor to Kurtinets. At the same time he turned casually to the tax officials with the words:

"And you, gentlemen, kindly continue, so that everything is ready when the assembly ends. The people have a long way to go."

A rustle passed over the room and died away in the far corners.

Kurtinets moved forward and stood in the small empty space before the bar; his eyes roved over the attentive faces before him. Many were familiar, and he smiled as at old friends. Reason and instinct told him that the occasion did not call for heated eloquence but for an explanation, and he spoke very composedly although it cost him no small effort.

"I have not heard what Father Novak has told you," said Kurtinets. "But I know why you have been brought to this inn, I know about the letter to Pan President that they want to make you sign, I know why there is brandy on the tables and why the tax officials are here. Now let's think it over sensibly, good people—why is it that just now all these gentry are tying themselves in knots to get the government to ban our Communist Party? After all, they always hated us, we've always been a thorn in their side with the truths we told. Has something new happened, then, to make them go to any lengths to get rid of the Communists? Yes, it has."

Kurtinets paused, and some of the villagers pushed away the plates of pork and rested their elbows on the table to listen better. Novak's chair creaked, and Gorulya saw beads of sweat on the face of the Medvyanoye elder.

"Yes, something has happened," Kurtinets repeated. "Since Hitler took power in Germany, the breath of war has been coming from there like cold air from a cellar. Now even a child can see where the danger lies for Czechoslovakia. And what is war—I ask you, good people, what does war mean? Do you remember what war means for working folk?" Kurtinets' eyes swept the men

before him.—“Does Fyodor Skripka of Studenitsa want war, or Mikhailo Lemak of Chorny? Remember, its heavy burden will not fall on the gentry, but on you. . . . There is only one thing in the world that can make Hitler draw back his hand, and that thing is—the friendship of our republic with the Soviet Union, with a great country that has no need of other people’s land, other people’s wealth. We Communists are fighting for that friendship, and we shall carry on the struggle to the end. Our demand to the government is that it recognize the Soviet Union and conclude a treaty of friendship with it,” Kurtinets turned to Novak, “and that is what worries certain parties, Pan Father, worries them because Hitler has ordered them to clear the way for him. It’s difficult work, that, and it’s dirty work—but it’s well paid.”

Novak paled. His thin upper lip twitched.

“That is slander, Pan Deputy!” he said threateningly and cast his eyes upwards. “God is my witness, it is slander!”

“Eh, Father,” cried Gorulya, “that’s what the horse-thief says when they catch him—calls God to witness that he never stole a horse in all his life. Isn’t that right, folks?”

A roar of laughter swept the room, mingled with shouts of: “Right! Aye, that’s what they do! Eh, Gorulya, you’ve got a tongue!”

Kurtinets waited for the laughter to die down, and when his voice was heard again, it held a note of mockery.

“You see, it wasn’t just for nothing they brought you here, and it wasn’t just kindness that made them promise to cancel your arrears. But maybe it’ll be the same with the arrears as it was with the boots in Velikoye before the elections to parliament?”

A morose-looking villager rose in his place. “It was the same with us in Chorny,” he said. “The Agrarian

party men came and promised a pair of boots to all as would vote for them, aye, and they found some as was ready to do it, and they even measured 'em for the boots."

"And did they get the boots?" asked Kurtinets.

"Nay, they never saw 'em."

"It was boots wi' your folks," somebody shouted from the corner. "Wi' us it was half a sack of maize for a vote! . . . But it's all the same, maize or boots—they promised us good times, and where are they, those good times?"

That started it. Everybody remembered what party had promised this and what party that, and how it had all been nothing but words.

It was no easy matter for Kurtinets to get the attention of the meeting again.

"Well, all right," he continued, when the noise at last died down. "And suppose they really do cancel the arrears this time, then with this sop—which won't make it any easier for you because they'll take bigger taxes next year—with this sop they buy you, and set working people to hound the Communists, so that Pan President in Prague can say: 'Look, the people themselves demand a ban on the Communist Party.' It is for you to choose what you will write to the President, what you will demand—war or peace, suppression of the Communist Party or freedom for it."

Benches and tables moved noisily. The elder Kazarik thumped on the bar with his fists, shouting: "Order! Order, please!"

Nobody listened. A roar of voices filled the inn. An elderly villager, Mikhailo Lemak, jumped up in his place.

"Hark, good folks!" he shouted. "Hark—I want to say something! Pan Stupa's here wi' us! We all know him, he's the right sort o' man! Let him talk a bit too, eh? Tell

us what folks think in the Czech lands, and Slovakia way too, eh? Pan Stupa!"

"Pan Stupa! Pan Stupa!" other voices caught him up. Stupa came forward.

"I always say only what I think and what I know. And I know they want to buy you," he glanced at the tax officials, "buy you cheap and buy you dirty, and I don't think they'll succeed. Fascism is reaching out for Czechoslovakia. For the present it's a mere shadow over the Sudetenland. But if something isn't done in time, it will become a terrible black cloud—looming over the Czechs, over the Russines, over the Slovaks. More than ever before, our country now needs a faithful and honest friend, one who will neither sell nor betray us, who will stand by us in the hour of danger. We do not need to seek that friend, he is there, he is waiting to hold out a hand to us. That friend is the Soviet Union.

"What man will lock the door against a true friend and throw it open to an enemy, a robber, a murderer? I don't think you have ever known such a man, any more than I have.

"You ask me what people think in the Czech lands and Slovakia. I have talked to ordinary folk in Bratislava, in Prague, in Plzen and in Košice. They think the same as you do, Comrades! They want work, bread and peace, and they do not want fascism!"

Again there was commotion in the room. The tax officials fidgeted on their chairs and looked with apprehension at the excited villagers.

Novak tried to slip out into the living-quarters of the inn, but Gorulya barred his way, saying meekly: "You stop here, Father. I'm right by you, I'll see nothing bad happens to you."

... A letter was drawn up by the whole assembly. The paper and pen were taken from the tax officials. Gorulya was elected secretary, despite his earnest objections.

"Don't you be proud, you just write what the folks tell you," cried Fyodor Skripka; his relief at not having sinned against his conscience made him even gay.

Gorulya seated himself behind the bar and laboriously put down the words the assembly dictated:

"Pan President, we want to be good friends with the Soviet Union. And let nobody think of touching the Communists. We want them to have complete freedom of action. It is not the Communists you should drive out, it is those rascals that want to sell Czechoslovakia to Hitler. This is the will of the people."

The letter was signed by a hundred and thirty-four people.

Matlakh had cause to be furious. Within a week a wave of similar meetings swept other villages and districts. A pile of letters rose on the President's table—letters similar to the one received from the Medvyanoye assembly. . . .

31

It was a summer of rain and clammy fog in Verkhovina. Sometimes the sky would clear for an hour or two and the sun would peep out tantalizingly, but then again the mists would lower and the rain return.

On some peasant plots the soil was washed away together with the young grain; on others practically nothing came up, and the peasants did not even get their seed back.

"Another cruel winter coming," people said in the villages.

Even before the meagre crop was in, the shopkeepers raised the price of maize. Cattle brought in for slaughter lowed in the yards, and men left to seek work in distant parts. Then silence descended, a brooding silence with nothing bright, no song, no laughter.

The knowledge of the disaster implacably approaching Verkhovina lay upon me like a crushing weight. I could think of nothing else.

Ruzhana understood how I felt; she herself was depressed by the thought of the famine threatening Verkhovina, but she tried to comfort me.

"It's not your fault, Ivanko," she would say. "You can't help it. There's nothing you can do about it."

That was reasonable enough, but all the same I felt somehow guilty and ashamed to look people in the face. It was with a heavy heart that I went about Matlakh's fields. These fields had been ploughed across instead of up and down the hill-slope, rows of bushes had been planted to protect them and special ditches dug to channel off the water. Even in such a summer as this the crops had grown thick and strong.

"Well, Pan Belinets," Matlakh observed in high satisfaction, "I never thought it would come up like this. It's not the same land. It's worth a fortune now! I've got you to thank for that, and I don't mind saying so!"

They say the appetite comes with the eating, and Matlakh certainly bore out the saying. As he reckoned up his profits in the autumn and tasted the first fruits of success, the word "more" was constantly on his lips. He had decided to start the second dairy-farm in the spring, but in the meantime he pondered day and night about how to expand the first. On hearing from commission agents that there were ten pedigree cows for sale in the old German colony near Kežmarok in Slovakia, Matlakh told me to go and see to it at once.

The cows really were first-rate, and I bought them. On receiving my telegram, Matlakh sent three drovers from Studenitsa, and a few days later the cows were on the railway. I myself left by passenger train for Volovets, where Matlakh's trap was to meet me.

The train arrived on time, but there was no sign of the trap. Rain was falling, time dragged heavily, and I decided to visit a teacher I knew, who lived not far from the sawmill, thinking I could spend the night with him if necessary.

I had just left the station and was passing the inn when I heard a man call my name; his voice broke on the last syllable as though the shout had burst out involuntarily, and he had regretted it when it was already too late. I turned and saw old Fyodor Skripka. He looked as though he were setting off somewhere; a knitted scarf was round his neck, and his invariable old felt cap pressed down over his ears; one hand held a knapsack and the other a twisted, knotted stick which he had used as far back as I could remember. Several other villagers stood crowded in the inn doorway.

"*Vuikul!*" I cried. "Well, I never expected to see you here!"

I went up and greeted the men standing on the porch. "Where are you going? Not to America, surely?"

Skripka sighed and looked round at the others as though in search of support.

"Nay," he said grimly, "folks say we've got our own America here."

I guessed from his tone that something had happened in Studenitsa and waited for him to tell me what it was and where they were going, but instead he asked: "Are you in a hurry, or are you just taking a walk?"

"I'm waiting for the trap to come from Studenitsa," I explained. "It ought to have been here. Maybe you saw it?"

"Hardly," said Dmitro Solyak, a tall, handsome, broad-shouldered man standing behind Skripka. "We're going to Studenitsa ourselves."

"Have you been far?"

"To Uzhgorod," Skripka answered. "The community

sent us to get justice, and now we're taking it back for Matlakh to break his teeth on."

He looked at me challengingly, and the eyes of the three standing behind him were cold and unfriendly.

"But what's happened?"

"Go to your master, he'll tell you," said Solyak bitingly.

"Here's what's happened," cried Skripka, unable to contain himself, and gave vent to a flood of curses. "Your Matlakh's wanting to take our land—my bit, and Solyak's, and Polovka's too! . . . Eh, what's the good o' talking about it!"

All the same, Skripka told me the whole story.

Soon after I left for Mukachevo the peasants had begun digging potatoes on their strips of land. On one of those busy days Matlakh's familiar high trap came along the road from Studenitsa to the dairy-farm. This was nothing unusual, and the peasants would have paid no attention had it not stopped in front of the potato-fields that bordered the farm. Szabo was driving, Matlakh sitting beside him. Some of the villagers hurried towards the road, but the quick-footed boys were there before them. The grown-ups saw Matlakh call the children and tell them something; the next moment they were clambering swiftly back up the steep slope, shouting the names of those whom Matlakh wanted. Soon about twenty men and women were standing by the trap. The men kneaded their felt caps in their hands, trying to read in Matlakh's face what he wanted with them. He, for his part, was very affable, talking of this and that, and even joking with Fyodor Skripka, telling him that he never got any older. Then he took a pad out of his pocket and turned some pages.

"Well, good folks," he began, "you've never harmed me and I've never harmed you, everything's always been according to law and above-board. Maybe we've not al-

ways seen eye to eye; if so I ask your pardon, God gives every man his road to follow in patience."

Never before had Matlakh talked so meekly; people felt that this boded no good, that some disaster was near—though what it was they could not guess.

Matlakh turned a few more pages in his pad.

"Now there's these debts of yours," he went on. "You didn't pay the rent last year or the year before either. I must ask you to pay, good folks. I didn't bother you before, but a year like this I may be looking for a bite to eat myself."

"Where can I get the money?" Maria Polovka said and sighed. "You can see yourself what's on the fields."

"That is in God's hands, not mine," said Matlakh, and sighed in his turn. "Well, if you can't pay, then you'll just have to get off the land, though I'm sorry to do it to such good neighbours."

Horror robbed them of speech. Barefoot, bare-headed, they stood by the trap, unable in the first moment to grasp the magnitude of the blow. Only Fyodor Skripka, who had stood blinking his red-rimmed, watery eyes and nodding in time to Matlakh's words, said with an artless, apologetic smile: "Why, you can't do that, Petrol! It's our land, how could we leave it? How could we leave our own land?"

Matlakh frowned.

"I don't want any land o' yours. I'm taking what's mine."

"How's that—how's it yours?" asked Fyodor Skripka with the same artless smile. "Aren't you feared God'll strike you? When have you ever done a hand's turn on it?"

"The land's mine," said Matlakh harshly. "There's papers to prove it. It was yours once, that's true enough, but now it's mine. I never forced you to take maize on security, you came yourselves."

"Aye—we came ourselves," Maria Polovka agreed hopelessly and burst into tears.

"Get on," said Matlakh, touching Szabo.

Szabo jerked the reins and the trap rattled off, leaving the people standing silently on the road. They understood well enough what Matlakh had said, yet they would not, could not believe that they were no longer the owners of the land soaked with their sweat.

When it became known that Matlakh had taken the case to court, the village seethed with suppressed excitement and alarm. Cottage doors banged more often than usual, and neighbours whispered together. Even those not affected felt insecure—who could say whether their turn might not come tomorrow? The innkeeper Popsha, envious of Matlakh's success, urged the villagers to seek justice in Uzhgorod. The ferment spread to neighbouring villages.

On the following Sunday a crowd of people gathered at Popsha's inn, so great that many were unable to get in and stood on the porch and under the windows. An oil-lamp shed a dim light through the clouds of tobacco-smoke. The excitement was intense, people shouted and interrupted each other; some said they should send runners to the Governor, others—to Prague, and others again—to the Agrarian party. Every man had his own idea, and Matlakh's victims were confused and distracted by conflicting advice.

"Eh!" sighed Fyodor Skripka despondently. "If only Gorulya was here, he'd know where to go!"

Gorulya was not in Studenitsa that day; Gafia was ill and he had taken her to the doctor in Mukachevo.

Then a voice rose above the hubbub.

"I know where he'd tell us to go—we must go to the Communists!"

That word brought back memories—the hunger-marches, the wood-cutters' strikes, the truths which the

Communists told boldly in parliament. There were a dozen parties in the region, every one of them claimed to stand for the people, but there was only one that really did so, only one that was incorruptible. . . .

The runners went to Uzhgorod.

"Here, look at that, just take a look," said Skripka, pulling a folded newspaper from under his shirt. "Look what they write here."

It was the Communist paper *Karpatskaya Pravda*, which had started to come out again that year. I unfolded it and saw a picture of the runners on the front page, standing on a wide asphalt road in Uzhgorod in their Verkhovina jackets, with haversacks and staves. "Truth and Justice," was written under the picture. "Why are they being driven off their land?" An article followed, explaining why the four men had come to Uzhgorod from the mountain village of Studenitsa.

Carefully, line by line, I read that wrathful, damning indictment signed by a familiar name: Olexa Kurtinets.

"You are told: These things are lawful," he wrote. "But we say: It is not lawful. Law must go hand in hand with justice. You are told: Here are the documents to prove that these men are no longer the owners of their land, they rent it from Matlakh. We answer: That land was taken from them by a trick, when they were starving.

"... These men have come from Studenitsa to demand protection, not to beg for alms. Today they are four, tomorrow they will be a hundred, and the day after—a thousand. We must not keep silent!"

I refolded the paper slowly and held it out to Skripka. The hot blood flooded my face, and I was thankful that the dusk concealed it.

"Did you manage to get anything done?" I asked.

"We might and we might not," said Solyak evasively.

"Why, don't you trust me?" My voice sounded strange in my ears.

Skripka shrugged his shoulders.

"God alone knows what you are!"

I burned with shame. These men did not trust me. I turned and walked slowly away from the inn. "God alone knows what you are!" Was that not the truth? Did I know myself what I was? Should I have told them that I was on their side, that I hated Matlakh as much as they did, that I had gone to work for him for the same reason that so many of them did? It would make no difference. I must act, not talk.

32

In the morning I was in Studenitsa.

I still had no clear idea what I should do. Knowing Matlakh as I did, I could hardly hope to induce him to give up his plan. In his greed for gain he would not stop short at crime. Nevertheless, I decided to see him first and try to discover his intentions.

To my surprise I found Matlakh in an even and, I would say, good humour. He had just finished breakfast. As usual he had eaten alone—I never saw him at table with his wife or son. His food was always the same—wild boar fat and sour milk; actually, he disliked sour milk, but somebody had told him that a man who ate it regularly could live for a century, so he took it every day in large quantities.

Matlakh talked about the good bargain he had made over the cattle, plans for the winter and a trip we were to take together to Uzhgorod where he wanted to buy the equipment for a small dairy. But not a word did he say about what had taken place in my absence. I could not fathom the reason for his silence—either he did not want to talk about the matter, or he thought it not worth mentioning.

"We'll soon be scooping up a bit more land for the farm," Matlakh said at last when everything else had been discussed.

"Whose land, Pan Matlakh?"

"Whose? Mine, of course!"

"You mean the village land?"

Matlakh's eyes narrowed meanly.

"It used to be, but now it's mine. What fools those people are! . . . Sent runners to Uzhgorod. Eh, but they're fools all right!"

Just why they were fools, however, Matlakh did not have time to tell me. From the street came the sound of a motor and the shouts of children.

I looked out of the window. A dark-blue car had drawn up before the gate.

"Who's that?" Matlakh growled, turning his chair.

The door of the car opened, and a flabby-faced man emerged, smoothing his clothes and stamping.

"Leshchetsky," I said.

Matlakh scowled.

"Leshchetsky? What's brought him here?"

I left the window, irritated and vexed, and picked up my hat.

"Nay, you stay here, Pan Belinets," Matlakh said, noticing my movement. "I've no dealings with him to keep secret."

I understood from his tone that he could make a pretty good guess what had brought Leshchetsky, and hoped that my presence would prevent the talk taking any turn he did not desire.

"Anyone home?" a voice called in the passage. The door opened and Leshchetsky entered.

"Eh, Mikhailol!" cried Matlakh.

"Praise be to Jesus!" said Leshchetsky—his habitual greeting.

"Eternal praise!"

Leshchetsky turned down his coat-collar and his eyes travelled swiftly round the room, coming to rest for a fraction of a second on me.

"Why, haven't you two met before?" Matlakh asked Leshchetsky slyly, suppressing a smile. "This is Pan Belinets. Pan Mikhailo Leshchetsky meet Pan Belinets. Well, sit you down, Mikhailo, sit down and tell me what's the news in town."

"The news?" said Leshchetsky, seating himself. "Everything's just as usual. Hard work and many worries. . . ."

"Borne in a true Christian spirit, eh? It will be reckoned to you."

"And for that I give thanks," said Leshchetsky, falling in with Matlakh's tone, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"And what are the worries, Pan Mikhailo, that have brought you all this way?" asked Matlakh, although such a question hardly befitted a hospitable host.

"One only," said Leshchetsky. "You!"

"Me! You will have your joke, won't you?"

"Permit me to ask, Pan Matlakh. . ." Leshchetsky began, but glanced at me and broke off short.

Matlakh caught his look.

"Go on, go on, ask me anything you want. I like everything open and above-board, and I've no secrets from Pan Belinets."

"Have it your own way," said Leshchetsky. "What I want to know is, what's all this that's been happening here?"

"All what? I don't know what you're talking about," Matlakh said with an innocent look.

"Don't know, don't you?" snorted Leshchetsky. "And the people sending runners to Uzhgorod and even the papers writing about it. . . ."

As he said this, Leshchetsky pulled a newspaper out of his pocket, unfolded it and handed it to Matlakh. I caught a glimpse of a familiar head-line and familiar picture on the front page.

"Gone and printed it, have they!" Matlakh fumed. "I take my own land and they say: robbery!... Who wrote this? Who is that Olexa Kurtinets anyway?" Then, evidently feeling that he was lowering himself before both Leshchetsky and me, he laughed loudly. "He writes well. Got a sharp tongue, he has, that Kurtinets! There's none like that in our Agrarian party." He turned his body clumsily to Leshchetsky, brandishing the newspaper. "He's bold enough, eh? But what he doesn't know is, I'm not easily scared. Touch me, and you touch the whole state! And there's you, scared as a mouse! You came here scared all right, didn't you?"

"You can think what you like," said Leshchetsky, "but we have to consider public opinion. We're not on a desert island."

"You just keep that public opinion of yours in hand. Why do you think I spent all that money to make you a deputy? You don't need to come to me to learn what to do, Mikhailo.... But there's one thing I *can* tell you—you've molly-coddled the folk too much. Keep 'em down with a firm hand. Or they'll be neither to hold nor to bind. And them pictures o' the President with a twig in his hand—what he needs is a good strong whip, not a twig."

"Maybe, but it's something else we've got to discuss now," said Leshchetsky. "This business with the land has to be settled somehow or other."

"Isn't that what I say? Do those folks owe me money or don't they? They do! I let them alone a long time. Now I want what's mine. If they can't pay, then let the court put 'em off the land; that's the law."

"That's all quite true," said Leshchetsky frowning. "But you ought to wait a bit. There's a famine coming.

The people are restless. There's talk that the Communists are getting ready for a hunger-march, and then a thing like this crops up. Verkhovina is like dry timber, a spark is enough to set it afire!"

"That's your affair—to see it doesn't."

"And then there's this, Pan Matlakh. The court would hardly give a decision in your favour. I've taken advice about it. Those debts of yours only come to about half the value of the land! You can't get it legally...."

At this point Matlakh turned to me.

"Pan Belinets, maybe you'd like to go and rest a bit while the deputy and I finish our talk."

There was nothing to do but leave them.

Leshchetsky stopped another half-hour and then drove away from Studenitsa. Immediately afterwards, Matlakh too found himself in a great hurry to go to Uzhgorod.

My premonition that Matlakh had some scheme in his mind became a certainty.

"Pan Matlakh," I said, "I have to be in Uzhgorod to-day as well."

"Well, come along, then," he said with a nod. "We can see about the dairy at the same time."

33

I do not know when I took my decision. It may have been in Volovets when old Fyodor Skripka said: "God alone knows what you are." Now, however, it was fixed and firm. I knew that I could not stand aloof while the tragedy unfolded before me. What I needed at this moment was not advice, but words of encouragement from somebody close to me, somebody who could understand. Gorulya was not there.... Chonka?... What could he understand of the turmoil within me? Ruzhana?

How glad I was when I saw her running to meet me!

The glow of happiness in her eyes, her shy smile as she gave both hands to me seemed dearer than ever before!

"Ivanko! What a long time you've been away! Is it a year, or more?"

"Only a week."

"'Only'! You think that's not much?"

"It is a very long time, but you see—I never stopped thinking about you, so it seemed all the time as if we were together."

"I'll forgive you, then." Ruzhana smiled and led me across the hall to the living-room.

"Nobody is home," she said over her shoulder. "Vasil is at the bank, and Julia is out with the children. . . . I'm so glad you've come, and I do hope it's for a long time."

"And if it's for good?"

Ruzhana stood still.

"To stop in Uzhgorod altogether?"

"Perhaps."

She looked into my face.

"Something's happened to you," she said slowly.

"Well—not yet, but—"

"No, something has happened," Ruzhana repeated stubbornly, and there was alarm in her eyes.

I had no intention of concealing anything from her, on the contrary, she was the only person whom I trusted, I had come to tell her everything—but not like that, at once, almost before I had entered the house. . . .

Ruzhana settled me down in an arm-chair and then sank on to a soft low hassock opposite.

"Tell me. Don't keep back anything," she said, looking me straight in the face.

I told her all about what had happened in Studenitsa. Ruzhana listened in silence.

"Great heavens!" she cried when I finished. "How cruel! Isn't there any way of stopping it? It's a crime!"

"I don't know," I answered. "But I can't keep quiet

about it. I shall tell Matlakh what I think, I shall demand. . . ."

Ruzhana seized my hand.

"Matlakh? But he'll never listen to you, Ivanko!"

"I don't expect he will, I'm not nursing any illusions on that score. Well, so much the worse for him."

Ruzhana looked frightened.

"That means. . . . That means you'd leave him?"

"Yes."

"But what about *us*, Ivanko? . . . What would happen to *us*?" The full realization of all it meant dawned on her, and she jumped up and ran to me; clinging to me she whispered desperately: "For Heaven's sake don't do that! Don't do anything that would part us. If only there were some way I could help those poor people I would, but I'm powerless, and you're powerless, and it won't change anything if you do leave Matlakh. . . . Think of our future."

"That's just what I am thinking about, Ruzhana, our future. . . ."

I rose silently from the chair. Ruzhana looked at me questioningly, imploringly. At that moment I realized it had been a mistake to come here, a mistake to expect words of encouragement.

"Why don't you say something? Are you angry with me?" Ruzhana asked in a trembling voice. "I only want your good."

"That's not true!" I said bitterly. "For the sake of our happiness you want me to sell my conscience. Oh, I know that you're sorry for the wretched ones who are being driven off their own land, condemned to starvation, to death. But what's the good of your pity? I can't live like this any longer, Ruzhana, I can't!"

"Have you no feeling for me?" asked Ruzhana with a grim smile. "You mustn't sacrifice our happiness, you've no right to do it."

I picked up my hat and walked towards the door. On the threshold I stopped for an instant. . . .

Ruzhana stood silent, her eyes lowered.

I almost ran down the yard.

By the gate I slowed my pace and glanced round in the secret hope that Ruzhana would call me. But in vain. . . .

Matlakh was not in the hotel. I had to wait for him with his son as my companion—a silent, surly fellow, whom Matlakh now kept as secretary in place of Szabo.

I remember one day coming to Matlakh and being extremely surprised at not finding his shadow with him.

"It would do me little good to keep him any longer," Matlakh admitted to me frankly. "I go seeing people; and he doesn't look like a human being, more like a rat he is."

"Why then did you make him your secretary in the first place?" I asked.

"Fooled myself," Matlakh growled, avoiding my glance.

This was not true. Matlakh knew well enough that the man he employed was a vile creature whose envy knew no bounds. Szabo had, however, exceeded even his master's expectations. To have a man like that around was growing increasingly inconvenient. Moreover, not only Matlakh's farm-hands, the villagers and I shrank from the man, but Matlakh, deep down in his heart, despised him too. There was no way out but to dismiss him, and Szabo disappeared, where to, nobody knew.

. . . I had to wait a long time. Dusk was falling when Matlakh returned to the hotel very pleased with himself.

"Well, Andrei," he said to his son, as he wheeled his chair into the room, "the Communists can write all they want. The debt's registered in court. Now I've got the law on my side! Now. . . ." Matlakh broke off as he saw me. "Ah, it's you, Pan Belinets?" He wheeled his chair round the room. "Well, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. . . ."

I went cold with indignation. So he regarded me as his accomplice! But what else could he think of a man wholly dependent on him, whose knowledge he had bought as he bought everything he needed—labourers' hands, the law, Deputy Leshchetsky?

"Pan Matlakh," I said, barely controlling myself, "I must speak to you."

My tone and my face must have surprised Matlakh. He glanced at me uneasily.

"Well, what is it? I'm listening."

"Pan Matlakh, what you're doing with Fyodor Skripka's land, Solyak's and the rest is a crime, it's robbery! If you're not afraid of God, then have a fear of the people. They will never forgive you!"

Matlakh looked at me with a condescending smile. His first thought had been that I had brought news of more complications or disturbances in Studenitsa, but now he was reassured.

"Listen here, Pan Belinets," he said, "I'm doing business, and big business! Maybe it's the first time we've had anything like it in all the Carpathians. And you stand there and call it robbery! Well, all right, then, what if I do pity them and let them off? Somebody else'll do it to them just the same. D'you think anyone pitied me over there in America, in the mines? Eh? They wrung the sap out o' me and they'd have wrung it out to the last drop if I hadn't learned to do as they did—stop feeling sorry for people. And as soon as I did that, luck came my way. That's how life's made!"

"Not life, but profit, you ought to say."

"That's the same thing, birds of a feather," said Matlakh with a wave of the hand. "Now I'll just give you a word of good advice, Pan Belinets, and it's this: It's no business of yours how I make my way. You'll be easier and happier in your mind if you just don't think about it, and as for me—well, God's my judge, not you."

"Unfortunately it's not in my power to judge and pass sentence on you, but it is in my power to say I can't and won't work for you any longer. You're driving people off their land, land that justice says is theirs, no matter how many courts say the opposite!"

"Eh, so that's where we are, is it?" Matlakh said staring at me. "You're making a mistake, you're making a big mistake. . . . You won't find a better job anywhere, and you'll have a hard time finding one at all, you'll wear your feet out tramping the streets. . . . And then you ought to think of that house, it isn't half paid for yet. . . ."

The hot blood rushed to my face and my palms felt warm and moist. For an instant I again saw Ruzhana as she had been that day when the foundation-stone was laid; but the vision soon faded.

"Is that all you have to say?" I asked.

"What more's there to say?" Matlakh shrugged his shoulders. "I'll be frank with you—I need you, Pan Belinets, but I need the land more. You fret a day for a man, but you fret your whole life for land. I'm speaking straight."

"And I shall do the same," I said and rose. "Look for another man to do my work."

Matlakh's short fingers clutched the wheels of his chair with the convulsive grip of rage.

I turned and went to the door.

"You'll regret it, Pan Belinets," Matlakh called after me.

"No, I won't."

I took my rain-coat off the hook in the dimly-lighted entry, and heard Matlakh's son say: "He really is going."

"He'll come back!" Matlakh exclaimed confidently, in a loud voice evidently intended for my ears.

"But what if he doesn't?"

"He'll have to, I've got him bound hand and foot."

... The stairs seemed endless. Down, down. . . . "Bát'a shoes. . . . All humanity. . . . The best soap. . . ." Ah, yes, that was the door! It opened silently. A few more steps and I was out of the Bercsenyi Hotel, standing in the street.

The chestnut vendor at the corner was blowing up the charcoal under his roaster. On the opposite corner, Uzhgorod brokers and businessmen were making deals in whispers. A man in a much mended overcoat with the collar turned up walked aimlessly along the pavement, looking in the shop windows.

"Would you be so kind as to assist me?" he asked as he drew level with me. "I hate to beg, but. . . ."

I took a few coins out of my pocket and put them in his outstretched hand. He thanked me and went on with the flagging step of a man who has nowhere to go.

I passed through the centre of the town and came out on the embankment. The lights were going on in the streets and house windows, and those lights combined with the cool breath of the river and the monotonous ripple of its water had a soothing effect upon me. My mind began to work clearly again.

What ought I to do now? Go to Gorulya, to Studenitsa, warn them of Matlakh's deal with the judge? . . . But Studenitsa was a long way off, and every day was precious. . . . Then inspiration came—Kurtinets! . . . It was only twenty-eight miles to Mukachevo where he lived and where the Regional Committee of the Communist Party had its headquarters. My mind was made up. I took the last bus and an hour and a half later I was in Mukachevo.

I had often passed the Workers' House, a one-storey building with a bas-relief on the façade of a worker smashing his chains with a hammer. This was where

the Regional Committee and the *Karpatskaya Pravda* had their offices, and I went straight there from the bus.

No luck.

"Comrade Kurtinets isn't here," said a slender, black-haired woman with a pleasant, youthful, but tired face, giving me a quick, searching glance. She had come from a room near by, and through the door I could hear the rapid click of a typewriter and a deep voice dictating unhurriedly.

"But I've got to see him! It's very important!"

"Won't anyone else do?"

"No, it's got to be him."

The woman hesitated.

"He's not well," she said. "He's at home. But—excuse me, who are you, please?"

I gave my name.

"Belinets. . ." she repeated, then evidently remembered something. "Wait a minute, Studenitsa . . . Gorulya? . . ."

"Yes, that's right, Gorulya!" I caught her up gladly. "I haven't come from him, though. But I've got to see Pan Kurtinets at once, it's something very important indeed."

The woman thought for a moment, then glanced at the door leading into the next room.

"Wait a moment, please," she said.

In a minute she returned in coat and beret.

"Come with me, Pan Belinets, I'll take you to him," she said simply, and went to the door, buttoning her gloves on the way.

We had to cross the whole town. The lights were on. There were few people about. As in Uzhgorod, white leaflets were pasted here and there on the house walls: "Fascism means war! Down with fascism!"

Some of these leaflets were torn, as though attempts had been made to scrape them off. These were traces of the unseen fight—a stubborn struggle that made one cautious and alert.

My companion at last stopped at the entrance to a three-storey house.

"Here we are," she said.

She led me up to the first floor, took a key out of her bag and opened the door of one of the flats. A light snapped on, and I saw that we were in a small hallway. Before I had time to see anything more, two little boys came running out.

"Mummy's come home! Mummy's come home!" they cried, jumping about. They took no notice of me, but hugged her from both sides, burying their faces in her coat.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, let me take my coat off!" said their mother, but did not move to free herself from their embrace. One of the boys, about seven years old, was very much like her—the same black hair and large eyes; the second, about three years younger, was a sturdy, fair-headed little chap whose movements were still awkward and uncertain, and who reminded me somehow of Kurtinets.

"Mummy, Mummy, you aren't going away any more, are you?" the children asked.

"Yes, I am, I've got to go back soon. . . ."

"Anna," a voice said through the half-open door, "have you brought somebody?"

"Yes. May we come in, Olexa?"

The room we entered was small, with books everywhere. Kurtinets was half sitting, half lying on a sofa at the back of the room near a table piled with manuscripts and printer's galleys, a coat flung over his legs. He had been badly wounded during a big strike several years before, when the gendarmes had opened fire on the strikers. His life had been saved, but his wound sometimes opened and caused him no little pain. It was troubling him now.

As we came in, Kurtinets looked hard at me, shading his eyes with his hand. I did not expect him to recognize me, for we had met only once, and a long time ago.

"Isn't it Pan Belinets?" he said after a moment.

"Yes, Pan Kurtinets, you've a good memory."

"I can't complain so far," he said with a smile as we shook hands. "I don't know what the future holds. Maybe science will find some way of preventing people from getting old. I'm a great believer in science."

"How do you feel?" asked Anna, sitting down on the edge of the sofa. "You look better."

"I'm much better," Kurtinets said quickly. He was still looking at me with a mingling of inquiry, wonder and uneasiness. He pulled an arm-chair closer and asked me to sit down. "I'm glad to see you, Pan Belinets, and I'm not merely being polite. As to my condition, well, never mind, I'm all right."

"I was told you were ill," I said, "but I didn't know where else I could go."

Kurtinets' face tightened.

"What's happened?"

Rather disjointedly I told him. Several times he interrupted me with questions, and my answers deepened the concern on his face.

"Gorulya doesn't know of this yet, does he?" Kurtinets asked when I ended.

"No. I learned about the court only today, in Uzhgorod."

"Who's Matlakh got behind him there?"

"He didn't mention any names."

"It doesn't matter much," said Kurtinets. "It's not hard to guess."

With a resolute movement he flung off the coat, rose, and began to dress, his face twisting with pain. His wife did not prevent him, she only asked: "Are you going to the Committee, Olexa?"

"Yes. You have to go back too, don't you?"

Anna nodded. "We'll go together." And then after a moment's thought she asked: "Shall we have to make up tomorrow's issue afresh?"

"I don't think so. In any case, the censor wouldn't pass even the smallest report about this scandalous affair. . . . But the whole of Verkhovina's got to know about it. . . . There's only one way—leaflets!" Kurtinets turned to me. "How are you fixed for time?"

"I'm at your disposal if I can help in any way," I said.

It was long after midnight before we left the Committee. I had to repeat my story, this time to several people. Kurtinets advised me to stay in Mukachevo. He did not let me go to the hotel, however, but took me home with him.

All night long a light burned in Kurtinets' room. I lay half awake, hearing muffled sounds of the typewriter, of people coming and going and the outer door being quietly opened and shut. Towards morning I finally fell asleep, but not for long. Kurtinets wakened me. He switched on the light and handed me one of the first damp sheets of a leaflet calling for defence of the Studenitsa villagers who were being driven off their land.

I had not the faintest conception as I read it of the mighty response it would arouse in Verkhovina.

35

Verkhovina was in a ferment.

After the church service on Sunday the Studenitsa priest preached a sermon to the villagers. From the wooden balcony running round the outside of the church, he addressed the people standing with bowed heads before the building in the chilly autumn wind, and urged

them to be patient and meek, promising them the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal bliss. They listened despondently.

"Our Lord God suffered for the sins of men," the priest intoned monotonously, "and he sends us trials that we may atone for our sins through patient suffering."

"Spiritual Father, I've a question to ask you," a voice broke in suddenly, and Gorulya pushed his way through to the balcony.

The crowd stirred like trees in a gust of wind. The men raised their heads and stared, the women pulled their shawls round them and the children pressed close to their mothers' skirts.

Gorulya waited, then turned so as to see both the people and the priest.

"You talk about sins," he said. "But what sins has this child got?" He went to the front of the crowd where Fyodor Skripka was standing with his five-year-old grand-daughter, picked her up like a feather and held her high up for all to see. "What sins has she got, good people," he repeated, "that the Lord God should send her trials to atone for them? For what sins are she and her father and grandfather being driven off their land? Why does God say no word about that, Spiritual Father?"

"Blasphemer!" rasped the innkeeper Popsha, who was standing near by.

"Nay, I'm no blasphemer," said Gorulya calmly, shaking his head and still holding the frightened child. "I want to hear the truth. . . . Are my sins greater than Matlakh's? Is it me. . ." Gorulya's voice choked with rage, "is it me, and Fyodor Skripka, and Olena Shtefak who are trying to put the bonds of fascism on the people, as Hitler's done in Germany, or is it Matlakh and the agrarians?" Gorulya advanced on Popsha. "Maybe it's

not Petro Matlakh but me that bribed the judge to put down debts against our people so as to take their land? Speak out—tell the people straight—who is it?"

"Answer that! Speak out!" people shouted from all sides.

The despondent submission of a few minutes ago had disappeared like mist under a hot summer sun, and from the very depths of their beings rose a painful, burning anger. Yes, they had sinned, but not against God, before God they felt no guilt. They had sinned against each other, families had been rent by strife over the division of property, men had fought with axes over field boundaries, they had envied the chance earnings of a neighbour. But under this froth, the longing for truth, freedom and justice burned in them like glowing coal under ashes.

The crowd was in a tumult. Everybody talked at once.

Gorulya set down the frightened child; she ran to her grandfather and clutched at his hand.

"Good people!" Gorulya shouted. "The Spiritual Father here says: 'Be patient and endure, endure everything.' But who's to endure what? The gentry to endure their wealth, and we—hunger and injustice?"

"We worked for what we've got!" Matlakh's wife cried shrilly.

"Maybe you'd like to swap?" Fyodor Skripka asked her. "To make it easier for you I'll give you my empty stomach—it's light enough, God knows, and you can give me a bit o' money and your maize."

"It would break your back!"

"That's no matter, the neighbours 'ud help me!"

Laughter rose, but Gorulya broke in.

"Well, good people," he said, "shall we be patient and endure, as the priest says, and wait till Matlakh drives everyone off the land and hunger mows us down?"

Suddenly Olena's hoarse, breaking voice rose from the crowd.

"Bre-e-cad!"

Gorulya did not see who had cried out, but he caught up the word.

"Yes, bread! Work! And justice! No fascism! Good people, we'll go to Mukachevo! We won't be alone, all Verkhovina will be with us!" He flung a handful of leaflets that fluttered over the crowd.

"To Mukachevo!"

"To Mukachevo-o-o!"

By evening all the neighbouring villages knew that a hunger-march from Studenitsa was on its way to Mukachevo, and the news swiftly travelled farther. When the two hundred marchers headed by Ilko Gorulya came to the next village at dawn, they found another column waiting for them, carrying crimson streamers with the words in paint still wet: "Hands off the Studenitsa land!" "Down with fascism!" "Bread for the hungry!" The columns merged and went on.

It was a bright autumn day with a faint warmth from the sun. The forest, fresh after the rain, was touched with russet and the shadows of wind-driven clouds passed swiftly over. The men were in their homespun jackets, with knapsacks and staves. The boys had red hearts, their national ornament, stitched to their jacket-lapels. The women stirred the dust of the road with cold, bare feet, carrying their heavy shoes slung over their shoulders. A good many children were in the column; when they were tired their parents or the people near by carried them, and although most of them had no clear idea of where they were going or why, their childish faces bore the same look of stern concentration as those of the adults.

Semyon Rushchak walked beside Gorulya, holding his little daughter Kalinka by the hand. She trotted along



on her bare feet, keeping up with difficulty, looking at the flapping red flag carried in front by a sturdy wood-cutter from Zarechye and screwing up her eyes, startled, every time the flag snapped in the wind.

At every cross-roads more and more groups of villagers joined the column, and it took them in like a river absorbing its tributaries and growing broader and deeper. By midday there were several thousands, and there were still plenty of villages and cross-roads ahead. People said that more columns of hunger-marchers were on their way to Mukachevo from other mountain regions.

In some villages a halt was called, and there were spontaneous meetings. Then the column re-formed and moved on again; looking back, Gorulya could no longer see its tail-end.

The people halted for the night two or three miles from a big village and camp-fires were lighted. They had supper in silence, as though shy of each other. Some quickly ate a few potatoes they had snatched up before leaving, others had not even that. The children were put to sleep, the women lay down beside the fires, and the men sat smoking, staring into the flames, now and then exchanging a few brief words.

Somebody awakened Gorulya in the middle of the night. He rose on his elbow and saw a man in a black overcoat and a hat pushed to the back of his head, sitting by the fire. He stared vaguely for a moment, his mind dazed with sleep, then sat up quickly, all weariness disappearing in a rush of gladness.

"Aha! Comrade Kurtinets! Olexa!"

"Glad to see you, Ilko."

"Why've you come in the middle of the night like this?"

"Sent by the Regional Committee."

"That's fine," said Gorulya. "You know," and he nodded towards the fires, "this is an army!"

"How many are there?"

"I haven't counted," Gorulya said, shrugging his shoulders. "It must be ten thousand, maybe twelve."

Kurtinets rose and let his eyes travel over the fires. Then he sat down again.

"Splendid!... I've brought leaflets."

"How did you get here?"

"To Svalyava by car, then by horses."

"Wasn't it risky, coming alone?"

"I wasn't alone, there were comrades with me."

"That's better," said Gorulya. After a moment he said cautiously: "And how's my Ivanko? Still with you in Mukachevo?"

"No, he has left."

"Where's he gone?"

"He is here, with you."

"I haven't seen him," said Gorulya, worried.

"Haven't you, look harder then," said Kurtinets laughing.

Gorulya stared at him, bewildered, then rose and looked round.

I went up to him.

"Ivanko! My lad!"

We embraced.

"Now you've come," Gorulya whispered. "Now you've come for good. And it's been a long time..."

He took me by the shoulders as he had when I was a child, and turned me round to face the road.

"See how many there are of us?"

The fires stretched out in an endless chain, driving away the cold and darkness of the autumn night. Hundreds, thousands were sitting or lying by those fires. The people were on the march, and there seemed to be a menacing strength in those bright fires on either side of the road. They were like the fires which had lighted the meadow near Studenitsa in my remote childhood

days, when my mother had taken my hand, advanced into the circle before the assembly and said: "I am Maria Belinets. It is my will to be with the Ukraine, our mother, for ever and ever," and the assembly had responded: "So be it!"

"I'm coming with you, *Vuiku*," I said.

"That's good," Gorulya replied.

The sack brought from Mukachevo had already been unfastened by the fire, and Kurtinets now drew from it several packages of leaflets. He held one out when we approached.

Gorulya took the thin sheet; in large print on top it bore the words: "Demand bread and work! Demand a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union! Demand a united front against fascism!"

Kurtinets waited patiently while Gorulya read to the end, which, as usual, he did slowly, pondering every word.

"That's true, we're not asking for charity," he said. "We're demanding what's our own."

"Get them distributed first thing in the morning," said Kurtinets, lighting a cigarette with a glowing twig. "Tomorrow morning the workers of Mukachevo are going to declare a solidarity strike and will join you in the streets. Let the people understand their rights and their strength."

"They'll understand all right, don't worry."

"And let them know that our Party is always for them and always with them. Comrade Gottwald telephoned from Prague, he said the Central Committee attaches tremendous importance to this march. After all, it's not only a hunger-march, the people are demanding more than bread and work."

"That's true," said Gorulya. "You ought to hear what they say at the meetings about Hitler and all those

Pesigolovetses that do his dirty work here in Czechoslovakia."

Kurtinets nodded.

"I know that the column on the Irshava road is carrying an effigy of Henlein, and they've even got one of the priest Augustin Voloshin made of straw. . . . The people can sense where the evil lies; we've got to put it to them clearly that the struggle for bread and work is useless at this time without a struggle against the fascist danger. . . . Comrade Slavek's going to stop here with you, that's a decision of the Regional Committee." Kurtinets glanced at a short, thick-set, sturdy man. "He's a Czech, a mechanic at the Svalyava chemical mill. Do you know him?"

Slavek smiled.

"Yes, we've met."

"We certainly have!" said Gorulya. "He called me an anarchist once!"

"So that's all you remember!" Slavek laughed. "But I had cause for it—now hadn't I?"

"You certainly had," Gorulya admitted.

Kurtinets rose, and as he shook the leaves and grass off his coat he noticed Kalinka lying asleep. Her plaits were tousled and her face flushed with the heat of the fire, one arm was flung out sideways and the thin fingers moved as she slept.

"You've brought the children, have you?" Kurtinets whispered.

"Of course," Gorulya whispered back. "When the old eagle flies, the young one learns. . . ."

"Your grand-daughter?" asked Slavek.

"No," Gorulya sighed.

"She'll grow up to be a beauty," said Kurtinets.

"How long will her beauty last with a life like this?" Gorulya raised his eyes to Kurtinets' face. "But maybe it won't be so long now? Maybe we'll live to see it?"

Kurtinets understood.

"We'll see it! . . . You and I will see it."

"It's high time. . ." said Gorulya.

. . . They went from fire to fire, talking to all who were not asleep. Many people were awakened by the stir, saw strangers and came up to listen. Finally Kurtinets had to leave. He was going to the columns marching to Mukachevo by other roads.

There was no more sleep that night. Gorulya roused the boys at a fire near by, gave them brief instructions, and they raced off in all directions. This was the squad of runners. In a little while the Communists came to Gorulya's fire one after the other.

"The Regional Committee's sent us these leaflets," Gorulya told them. "Pick out all those that can read and hand them round; see that by tomorrow morning there's not a man, woman or child here that doesn't know what's in them." Turning to Slavek, he added: "That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's best," Slavek said. "No need to call meetings, let those that can read go from fire to fire!"

"Right," the men said, picked up packages of leaflets and disappeared. The last one Gorulya held out to me.

"Here, you go too, Ivanko."

Everybody was up with the first light of dawn. Leaflets fluttered in people's hands like white doves.

As I went round the fires, a far-away memory came back to me. Once more I saw the sun-baked road by the pass, the soldiers coming back from the war, and myself, a boy, reading the *Pravda* with Lenin's speeches on peace and land to the shepherds and wood-cutters.

Now, too, people listened with earnest attention, and each wanted to hold that leaflet for a moment. The very thought that the workers of Mukachevo, among them railway employees, tobacco-workers, upholsterers and

tailors, had in token of solidarity with the hunger-march declared a strike and were waiting in the city streets for the peasants, the wood-cutters and all other marchers to arrive, inspired a happy feeling of self-confidence and made each one feel himself part of a single, great, indomitable, organizing will.

The people fell into ranks and we took up the march again. The morning silence was filled with the beat of thousands of feet. Olena was beside me. She walked in silence, barefoot, her work-roughened hands unwontedly idle. She listened with a kind of surprise to the measured tread of the column as though it were new and wonderful music which she never wanted to forget.

I too listened: it was as though the very earth were breathing deep and full. It brought a sense of freedom, it filled me with strength, joy and excitement. It was like the first warm, fragrant breath of spring; you know that the frost and storms will come again, but nothing can drive the joy of that first warmth from the heart. Only one thing made me sad—the thought of Ruzhana. . . . Could it be that she would remain behind, far away from all this?

We came to a large market village.

As the head of the column neared the big square, a dark-blue open car shot round the corner and halted in the middle of the road, brakes squealing, and Leshchet-sky and two other men jumped up like jack-in-the-boxes. The front lines slowed down and moved aside to pass the car, but then a second one shot out and drew up beside it, blocking the way completely.

Gorulya's column stopped, but the people behind were still pressing on. Before he had time to turn and shout, we were separated from the others and found ourselves surrounded by villagers we did not know. Among them I caught sight—or it seemed to me I had—of Szabo. His long narrow face flashed past me and instantly van-

ished. Szabo? I wondered, greatly amazed. What had brought him to the ranks? Hard as I looked for him again in the crowd, I could not find him. I must have made a mistake, it was not Szabo I had seen at all—I decided and felt better.

Gorulya tried to press forward again, but after struggling past a few people, he stopped, evidently thinking it best to wait till the crowd quietened a bit.

The noise died down along the column. Then Leshchetsky, standing up in the first car, took off his hat.

"Good health to you, my friends!" he shouted.

"Good health to you, sir!" a few men mumbled.

"Since when have I been 'sir' to you?" Leshchetsky asked, frowning. "Maybe there're people from my own village here?"

"What if there are?" Gorulya shouted.

Leshchetsky peered at the speaker.

"That's not Gorulya of Studenitsa, is it? Sure enough, the very man! I didn't know you at once. If the old saying's true, you'll get rich. Or maybe you've got rich already?"

"My wealth is something you'll never count," said Gorulya. "But we know all about yours—the crowns that you get out of our people, and those the agrarians paid you to join 'em. That's right, eh, Mikhailo?"

"It's a lie!" Leshchetsky cried and hitched his shoulders nervously. "I haven't come here to joke with you, good people, but to warn you! Don't listen to the Communists! Don't listen to them! Go home quietly to your villages and wait. The Agrarian party will not let you down, it thinks about you night and day, it is your own party, the village people's party. Here is Pan Pospíšil, come to us from Prague," and he turned to a man with colourless eyes and a heavy jaw standing beside him. "Pan Pospíšil will hear all your needs and speak about them in Prague, and then we'll make

arrangements for the bank to issue a loan to every family. . . ."

"And what'll it cost us?" Gorulya roared. "What'll it cost us, that loan? Will it be the kind of loan you hand out for feeding pigs?"

"To hell wi' them!"

"We don't want your loans!"

"Work!" the cry came from all sides.

"Work and bread! . . . Hands off our land!"

"Get off the road!" shouted Gorulya. "Get out!"

With a common impulse about a dozen of us made a dash towards the cars to shift them off the road. Suddenly Semyon Rushchak, who was beside me, stopped short, seized my arm and pulled me back.

A gendarme officer slowly rose on to the porch, moved the spectators aside and stopped on the top step, looking down with a kind of mocking curiosity, his hands behind his back.

An ominous silence fell, and the column instinctively shrank back, leaving an empty space between the front ranks and the cars. Apart from the officer there were no gendarmes in sight, but all felt that they lay in ambush somewhere near by.

"Don't try to do anything foolish," Leshchetsky shouted, taking advantage of the silence. "Better go home quietly. The Governor has given orders to let no one into Mukachevo."

A murmur rose. Then Olena's figure detached itself from the column. Barefoot, in her embroidered homespun blouse, she made straight for the car. I could not see her face, but Leshchetsky's involuntary movement as though to ward her off told me the hatred he must have read in her eyes.

Everything happened in an instant. Olena quickened her steps to a run and flung herself on the car as though to dash it from her path in one movement. The car only

swayed. But a Zarechye wood-cutter had followed her, with others after him. The next instant I, too, was beside Olena. The car was lifted off the ground. I saw Leshchetsky's frightened face as he clutched at the side. And at that moment, almost drowned in the roar of voices, a shot rang out.

Pospišil, standing behind Leshchetsky, gave a cry, flung out his arms and fell back on the seat.

The cars were moved to the side of the road and the column, with Gorulya at its head, made for the square.

"Get into line! Get into line!" Gorulya kept shouting, and dozens of runners caught up the words and passed them down the column.

We sorted ourselves out as we marched, without stopping, anxious to pass the square as quickly as possible. But it was no good. When we entered it, we saw a line of gendarmes drawn up at the other end.

Slavek whispered something to Gorulya. The latter called one of the runners, and a short signal whistle shrilled down the lines.

The column slowed down, halted, and then began to melt away. It was an amazing sight. Thousands of people silently scattered to all sides, disappeared in side-streets and into yards. The road emptied rapidly before my eyes.

It was only later, when I was walking with Semyon through the maize-fields and the village was far behind, that I learned this had been a tactical plan worked out in advance—to disperse if gendarmes blocked the way, and gather again on the road at a fixed place.

We made our way over the fields in small groups, never losing sight of the road, and came back to it when we saw a red flag on a wayside tree—the signal to assemble.

Gorulya was arrested in Mukachevo only after thousands of demonstrators had marched through the streets and compelled the authorities to accept the petition with their demands and turn it over to the President.

The gendarmes found a revolver with an empty shell in Gorulya's pocket; this was to be presented in court as material evidence.

The name of the wounded Pospíšil was constantly in the papers: "He went to them with an open heart, and at that heart they fired. . . ."

The Czech nationalist paper published in Prague said: "Let this shot sober those Czechs who believe in the internationalism of the Reds. . . . Pan Pospíšil's condition is grave. . . ."

The news of Gorulya's arrest and the charge brought against him found František Stupa in a far-away village in the Tatra Mountains where he had gone to finish a novel. On hearing it, he dropped everything and hurried to Mukachevo, then to Prague, and announced that he was undertaking Gorulya's defence.

The trial was to be in Košice—an old Slovak city where the regional court dealt with the most important cases in Sub-Carpathian Rus.

I arrived in Košice three days before the trial, and found Stupa, Anna Kurtinets and Slavek already there. Gorulya's arrest and the monstrous charge against him had been a terrible shock. I literally could not sit still and implored Stupa to tell me what I could do to save Gorulya.

"Patience! Patience!" he urged. He was an old hand at cases like this. "Patience! We have to wait for the trial!"

A day passed, a second, then came the staggering news: the trial was to be held not in Košice, but in Brno.

"A transparent trick!" said Stupa, pacing up and down. "They're afraid—afraid of protests and demonstrations. Košice's too close to Sub-Carpathian Rus, anything might happen. Brno's much more convenient from their point of view—a Czech population. And it's farther off. . . . Of course I filed a protest, but it didn't help. . . ."

That afternoon we were in Brno.

František Stupa went straight to the court-house, and people from the Brno Party Committee met Anna Kurtinets and Slavek at the station and went off with them, leaving me alone. We were all to meet later at the hotel.

I decided to go and see the Mareks. It was strange to be ringing at the familiar door again. Marek's wife herself opened it and drew me in with exclamations of delight. The noise brought Marek out of his study, and he at once began to shower me with questions. Actually, it was not so very long since we had seen each other, but to me it seemed a lifetime.

I told my friends what had brought me to Brno and Marek's face darkened; he took off his pince-nez and twiddled them in his fingers.

"Bad times are coming, Pan Belinets," he said gravely. "I didn't like the way things were going before, but now it's getting a bit too much. It's time for decent people to take a hand in these damn politics."

I stayed with the Mareks until evening, then went to the hotel and knocked at Stupa's door. He was in.

"Did you meet anyone on the stairs?" he asked as soon as I had closed the door.

"Yes, two men—an old man and a husky-looking fellow."

"Those are the ones—the envoys of the Czech patriots! Doesn't it sound fine? In reality, they're envoys of our home-bred Nazis. . . ."

Then František Stupa told me what had happened.

He had spent the whole day at the court-house, and on returning to the hotel had found an old man in a bowler hat and a brawny, truculent-looking tough waiting for him in the vestibule. Stupa knew neither of them, and they did not give their names.

"We wish to speak to Pan Stupa," said the old man, raising his hat.

They went into his room. Stupa asked his visitors to sit down, but they remained standing.

"We have been sent to you by the Czech patriots, sir," said the old man, looking sternly at Stupa out of red-rimmed eyes. "We know that you are a Communist, and that is deeply regretted by honest Czechs who admire your gifts."

"I don't think so," Stupa said with a smile.

"Deeply regretted," the old man repeated with emphasis. "You are a Communist, but nevertheless you are a Czech, and you should refuse to defend this Slovak or Russine who has fired at a Czech."

"I am defending an innocent man."

The old man's companion, who had so far said nothing, now broke in.

"The court'll decide that," he said. "But without you, Pan Stupa; that's what the Czechs wish."

"Are you supposed to represent them? There's nothing Czech about you. Czechs are honest, good-hearted, straightforward people."

The old man's pale face became still paler with anger.

"You assume that we're not Czechs?"

"It's not an assumption, I'm firmly convinced of it."

The old man put on his hat.

"We will leave you, Pan Stupa. Let us hope that this case will be your last."

"My last case is still ahead," said Stupa brusquely. "But in it I'll not be defending, I'll be prosecuting."

"Is it us you think you'll be prosecuting?" asked the truculent man with a jeer.

"Definitely. Both you and that which breeds you and your kind."

* * *

The court-room was a large, gloomy hall with dark panelled walls. High up under the ceiling hung dim lamps that lit only the middle of the room. Two ancient wrought metal candelabra stood at the ends of the judge's table, shedding a yellow light on the faces of those sitting there. As I entered, the thought had struck me that these candles were probably lighted only on special occasions, to remind people that the days of the Holy Inquisition were after all not so very far back.

The trial had already been in progress for an hour at least. The indictment had been read and now the witnesses were being examined. The first to be called was none other than Szabo. So I had not made a mistake on the village square after all. Thrusting forward his gaunt frame, fully aware of the weight of his testimony against the accused, Szabo spoke from the witness-stand with the brazen-faced insolence of one who enjoys the protection of those on high. Yes, certainly, he had himself seen Gorulya fire, he had seen it with his own eyes! Gorulya had pulled a revolver out of his pocket, yes, that one lying there on the table, and had fired at the esteemed gentleman. It was God's truth!

Stupa asked permission to question the witness.

"Will the witness kindly tell us who ordered him to join the ranks of the marchers?"

"Ordered me?" Szabo's bony hands described a semi-circle, the tips of his fingers landing on his chest. "Ordered me? . . . Nobody did, sir, I am a poor man and so I joined the marchers."

"Where?"

"At Zarechye, sir. I am employed at the office of the sawmill there."

"You mean you are listed there as an employee."

Szabo drew in his head between his shoulders.

"I do not understand, sir."

"There is nothing to understand," Stupa said smiling. "You're an employee one doesn't often see in the office."

"I'm a sick man, sir, and besides. . . ."

The witness hesitated.

"Besides what?" Stupa asked. "You are charged with other jobs?"

"Ye-es," Szabo admitted reluctantly.

"By whom? Not by the 'Soldier of Christ'?"

The judge rang his bell.

"The court is not interested in the jobs of the witness. They have nothing to do with the case."

"They have a great deal to do with it," Stupa objected. "The sawmill where the witness is listed as an office employee happens to belong to Pan Balog, the brother of Father Novak, unless it belongs to Stefan Novak himself; Father Novak is a leading figure among the clericals and nationalists of Sub-Carpathian Rus, and 'Soldier of Christ' is a sobriquet he uses. Now if you can get the witness to recall his conversation with Ivan Gurtyak, the Soldier of Christ's right hand, at the Chinadiyevo inn just before the hunger-march, then we shall have the truth."

"And what is the truth?" the judge cut in sharply with a cold stare at Stupa.

"That the shot was a frame-up. That the prosecution's witness and the man who fired that shot are one and the same person—in the pay of either the nationalists or the clericals. I again request the court to call to the witness-stand Helena Szabodos, the inn servant who overheard the conversation between the witness and Pan Gurtyak."

"The Court is not in a position to grant your request," the judge said, after going over some of his papers.

"What may the reason be this time?" asked Stupa.

"Helena Szabodos is not in Brno."

"But she was this morning!" exclaimed Stupa.

"She isn't now and her whereabouts are not known to the Court."

A murmur swept through the court-room. I could see the effort Stupa was making to restrain his indignation.

"Still the defence maintains that the shot and all that followed is a frame-up," his voice cut through the murmur, "and the reports that Pan Pospíšil's condition is serious and his life supposedly in danger are false."

"Proof!" shouted the prosecutor.

"Permit me," Stupa replied. "The bullet went through the muscle of the right arm. It was bandaged in Mukachevo and then Pospíšil was sent to Prague. But the Prague doctors did not keep Pan Pospíšil at the hospital. On the contrary, we witness an amazing phenomenon in medicine—a seriously injured man whose life is in danger goes for a walk in the park near Prague, and I imagine has a good laugh at the expense of those who are preparing to print his obituary."

"Prove it!"

"I ask the Court to call Dr. Josef Stoyansky of Prague Hospital, witness for the defence."

Dr. Stoyansky was called after a short interval.

A tall grey-haired man, very pale, entered the hall. He walked to the witness-box with an unsteady step.

"Dr. Stoyansky," said the judge, "is it correct that you were the first person to examine Pan Pospíšil's wound after he was brought to Prague from Mukachevo?"

"Yes," said the witness.

"Did you find his wound a slight one, or a serious, dangerous one?"

"Serious..." Stoyansky said in a muffled voice, his head hanging.

There was a stir in the court-room. Stupa leaned forward, his mind very much alert.

"Did you keep Pan Pospišil in the hospital, or did you send him home?" the judge continued.

Stoyansky hung his head still lower.

"He stayed in the hospital," he replied in a barely audible voice.

"Josef Stoyansky," asked Stupa, "why are you telling the Court the opposite of what you had previously told me? Who has been intimidating you?"

Stoyansky grasped the barrier and swayed. The judge rang his bell. Court attendants ran up to the doctor, took his arms and led him out of the hall.

"The witness has been intimidated," said Stupa. "Can't you see the condition he's in?"

"We are not interested in his condition, but in his evidence," the judge answered.

The defence raised an objection, but the Court listened indifferently, just as it listened to my evidence and that of numerous witnesses who testified for Gorulya.

Everything which I heard and saw was so unbelievable that at times I thought I must be dreaming. There were moments when I wanted to jump up and shout—not to the Court, but to the crowded hall: "Can't you see what's happening here? Why do you keep silent?" But Slavek and Anna Kurtinets restrained me.

"All this is new to you, Pan Belinets," she whispered sadly. "But we know what sort of trial Communists get. Comrade Slavek's been on trial, and five years ago I stood where Gorulya is today. And the Dimitrov trial in Leipzig—what about that for a monstrous provocation?"

Gorulya's manner while he was being tried seemed somehow strange. He listened with unconcealed curiosity to the indictment, read emotionally by a young Court

secretary, and to the testimony of the witnesses. Sometimes he spread out his hands and shook his head as much as to say: "Well, well, listen to that—the lies they tell! Enough to scorch your ears, lies like that!"

I was not the only one to be surprised and disturbed by Gorulya's behaviour.

During the recess Marek pushed his way to me through the people. He was choking with rage.

"It's monstrous!... It's fascism!... They've run amuck, the judge and the prosecutor! They don't bother even to make a show of legality!... It's terrible!... But your Gorulya—he's altogether too quiet. I don't like it."

"It worries me too, Pan Marek," I admitted.

After the recess I never took my eyes off Gorulya; he looked very old and defenceless sitting there, a man overtaken by a calamity, who did not yet realize what was being done to him.

The judicial proceeding drew to a close. The judge asked the defendant if he had anything to say.

Slowly, almost reluctantly, Gorulya rose from the bench and leaned over the barrier, gazing fixedly at something above the judge's head. People began whispering, stretching their necks and exchanging puzzled glances. Over the judge's seat hung a portrait of the President and above it the familiar coat of arms of the republic. There was nothing else.

The whispering grew to a murmur. Even the members of the Court moved restlessly and stole glances at each other. The judge looked up, following the direction of Gorulya's gaze.

"What are you staring at, defendant? We are waiting for you."

Gorulya smiled apologetically, still staring at something he alone appeared to see.

"I beg pardon, Pan Prosecutor, for troubling you. Maybe I ought to ask Pan Judge, but he's got his back

to the coat of arms, and my eyes are bad. What's that written there over the lion? I'd be real grateful if you'd read it to me."

"You ought to know that yourself, prisoner," said the prosecutor with a contemptuous smile. "It is the motto of the country in which you live—'Truth prevails!'"

"I thank you kindly, Pan Prosecutor," said Gorulya with the same apologetic smile, and his eyes passed over the people in the body of the hall. "I could read the first word 'truth' all right, but I just couldn't make out what came after it, and it's 'prevails.'"

He spoke quietly, gently, but in just that quietness the people, the Court and the prosecutor could feel a strength that it would be difficult to break.

"Truth prevails!" Gorulya repeated. "So that's what it is. . . ."

"But what has that to do with your trial?" asked the judge in irritation.

"Nothing, Your Honour," Gorulya answered. "Nothing at all!"

Slavek applauded and so did dozens of people in various parts of the hall. The judge rang his bell nervously and called for order. Gorulya stood waiting for silence, his head down, thoughtfully tracing lines on the wooden barrier with his finger. As soon as the noise died down, however, he raised his head and all could see that his face had changed, it had become strong and wrathful.

"It was not I who fired, and it was not I who wounded that man," he said, "and well the judge knows it, and the prosecutor, and that Judas who sold his conscience! I'm not feared o' prison, Pan Prosecutor, it's heaven compared with Verkhovina! Look at our children's hollow eyes, listen to our cattle lowing with hunger. I might say—listen to the weeping of our wives, but that you cannot hear, for they have no more strength to weep aloud. Eat the bread that we eat. Oh, bread, bread. . .

When the republic started, they promised us the Count's land, but who got it, that land? Latoritsa, and the inn-keepers, and the rich men of the villages—it just went from one set o' gentry to another, and that's your reform!"

A stern note of menace was in Gorulya's voice, and his words rang with indomitable strength. I listened in amazement and admiration for his courage.

"There's not a year without famine," he continued, "not a year without typhus or smallpox. Go and count how many there are blind in Verkhovina, how many with goitre, how many cripples and how many graves! With thirty thousand people in our district there's not a single doctor, but there's four inns in every village. Ah, Verkhovina, our land, our dear land! . . . You were trying to scare me with talk of prison, Pan Prosecutor. If I escape from your prison, and escape I shall, I give you my word for that, it won't be because I'm worse off there, it'll be to rouse the people again, rouse them to fight for a better life. You're not trying me for firing at a man. That's all talk and well you know it. You're trying me for being a Communist!"

On that word Gorulya stopped and stood with his head on one side, listening.

The hall rustled and fell silent as people caught a muffled roar penetrating from the street. It was not the accustomed hum of the city. Anna Kurtinets and Slavek exchanged glances, and their faces were stern, significant and triumphant. Slavek leaned over to me, whispering: "You hear that? It's the workers of Brno."

That sound was louder now, and we could clearly hear hundreds of voices chanting in Czech: "Free-dom for the Com-mu-nists! Pri-son for the fas-cists!"

The judge jumped up.

"Shut the windows!"

The court attendants, however, had anticipated the order and were hurrying along the balcony to the open windows.

"Prisoner at the bar, have you finished?"

"Don't be in a hurry, Your Honour," said Gorulya. "It's I that has the last word, not you. You can sentence me, but you can't be my judge. I have only one judge—the people! Have you ever heard of them? Truth will prevail all right, but it won't be your truth, it'll be mine and my Party's."

Sentence was pronounced that night: "Guilty. Seven years' imprisonment."

When we came out of the court-house, the square before it was packed with people and thunderous with the roar of many voices. To get through the crowd was utterly impossible. Dozens of torches flickering in a faint breeze cast their light on angry faces.

"They were afraid to hear that in Košice from Slovaks and Russines," said František Stupa. "Let them hear it in Brno from Czechs!"

37

The next day I took the train for Uzhgorod. There was nothing I could do in Brno. Stupa was looking after Gorulya's case—he was going to lodge an appeal.

I went straight from the station to Chonka at the bank—I was reluctant to go to the Lembeis, knowing that their door was closed to me now.

"What have you done?" said Chonka sighing as soon as he saw me. "What have you done?"

Chonka, it appeared, already knew everything about me, down to the last detail.

"That's Uzhgorod for you!" He flung out his arms in disgust. "You've hardly time to sit down to dinner on

Radvanka and they'll know on Sobranetskaya, at the other end of town, how many potatoes are on your plate. Julia called you mad, and the old man—a jail-bird. He shouted and raved and forbade anyone to mention your name.

"...Then, Ivanko, there is something else...."

This was followed by a deep sigh after which Chonka reluctantly dug into his side-pocket, producing from it an envelope which he handed to me.

"Forgive me for opening it. But I wanted to know if it was important."

On a sheet of glossy paper the following was written:

"In connection with Pan Matlakh's having withdrawn his security, we humbly beg you to send us another, as well as the money due on your instalment. If you fail to do so within two weeks' time, the house, in accordance with point 12 of our Contract, passes into the possession of the firm.

"Your humble servant,

"Kolena Jr."

"Something must be done," said Chonka, "and at once."

"Nothing need be done," I replied, "it's no use."

"You are mad," Chonka cried out. "Are you going to make a present of a house which is nearly done to these scoundrels? Has it come so easy to you?"

"What if it hasn't? I have no money nor can I get security."

I tore up the letter and threw the scraps into the wastepaper-basket. I was so deeply engrossed in what had now become part of my life that I regretted nothing. Ruzhana was my only link with the past and I felt heart-sore when Chonka began to speak of her.

"It's hard on Ruzhana, Ivanko. She's brooding and keeps to herself most of the time."

"I have not wronged her."

"I am a poor judge," said Chonka with a despairing gesture, "but I'm awfully sorry it all turned out so sadly. An unhappy end is something I jolly well can't bear!"

He took a well-sharpened pencil out of his pocket and traced a line with its point across his palm.

"I know you love her still, in spite of everything," he said, fixing his gaze on me.

"I do," I admitted, "and that's what makes it so hard...."

I asked Chonka to get my things from my room, arranged to meet him at seven by the bridge and went to look for a place to live. I was in luck. I soon found a room in a small house belonging to a widow; she herself lived with her son near by and this house was standing empty. It was in the upper part of the town, under a hill, pressed against a steep, bare, rain-washed slope.

Evening came. Punctually at seven I was at the bridge where I found Chonka waiting with my things.

"I can congratulate you," he said. "Your arrival today is all over town already. Julia met me with the news when I came home. Uzhgorod!..."

I took my suit-case from Chonka and we went to my new lodgings. He never stopped sighing and groaning the whole way.

The torturing search for a job began again, day after day, day after day....

There was no hope of finding work in my line. I was ready to take anything.

The room I had rented was in a working-class district on the edge of the town, populated by vineyard workers, masons, joiners from the "Mundus" furniture factory, men employed at the pottery. I soon made the acquaintance of a number of them, and I became quite friendly with a marble-cutter, a Hungarian called Sandor Lobanyi. He

was a man of about sixty, of alert and inquiring mind, a great talker and excellent at his job. He could discourse for hours on marble and its peculiarities and was convinced that it was only thoughtless ignorance that made people call stone cold and lifeless.

"There's life in stone if you handle it with love," he said. "And if you haven't love within you, even living things will be dead to you."

I made his acquaintance by chance. It was a Sunday, and the usual little groups of people had gathered at the gates to discuss the news. On that particular day there was indeed very important news to talk about—the government had at last recognized the Soviet Union and was preparing to conclude a mutual-aid treaty with it.

I joined one of these groups, standing not far from my gate.

"Grand news, eh?" said a tall, grey-haired old man. "High time, too! I've got a wound from the last war that still keeps me awake at night."

"Where do they come from, men like that Hitler?" somebody asked in indignant wonder. "Jumped out from somewhere and grows like a nettle in a field."

"When the ground's bad, you get a bad growth," the old man answered. "Well, never mind, that Hitler's got a headache now!"

"Better if he'd no head to ache," I said.

"And that'll happen too, all in good time," the old man said with a smile.

A fine drizzle began and people started making for home. The old man turned to me.

"We're neighbours," he said, "I live in your street."

That was how my friendship with Lobanyi began. On that first day we said little, but we felt a mutual liking. Before very long I had told him all my troubles and one day he knocked at my door to let me know that he had found a job for me.

"It's hard work, Pan Belinets, and it's irregular."

"Never mind what it is!"

I clutched at the chance like a drowning man at a straw.

"It's unloading marble at the railway," said Lobanyi. "There's nothing else. But you shouldn't starve. Perhaps later on something better'll turn up."

It certainly was hard work—carrying blocks of marble from railway trucks in the rain and piercing wind, but I would have been glad to do even work like that had it not been for the waits of two or even three days between the deliveries. There were fifteen of us "fortunate" ones. From morning till night we hung about at the goods station, afraid of missing a train. We waited for hours on end, but we were paid only for the actual time we spent unloading.

A week passed, a second, a third—and there was no change. The few crowns which I earned were barely enough for food, yet I had to stretch them out somehow to cover the rent as well.

More and more often I began to ask myself whether I ought not to leave Uzhgorod.

The thought was unpleasant, and I tried to drive it away. Ruzhana was in Uzhgorod. True, I carefully avoided the places where I might meet her, but the very feeling that she was somewhere in the same town, that she walked the same streets, braced me. And where, if it came to that, could I go?

I would gaze for hours out of my window at the forested spurs of the Carpathians white with the January snow. Beyond the first range rose a second and a third. Higher and higher. Verkhovina, my dearly loved land, the land that reared me! Surely it cannot be true that I am unwanted here, that you have no use for me?

I was standing by that window one day, my forehead pressed to the cold glass. Darkness was descending and

the snow-covered ground was lighter than the sky. Far, far away in the mountains a single light burned. Suddenly the door opened gently behind me and a soft voice said: "Ivanko!"

I turned. Ruzhana stood in the doorway.

The room seemed actually lighter.

I took one step, another and a third towards Ruzhana. Then recollecting myself, by a great effort of will I halted and repressed a surge of joy.

Ruzhana who had made a step forward too, stopped short, as I did. Though I could not see her face in the dark I knew it bore a puzzled expression.

We stood motionless, facing each other in dead silence. Caught in a turmoil of emotion, I was warding off the memory of our last meeting, and of the bitterness with which I had left the Lembeis—without a word of encouragement from Ruzhana. If I could only forget. . . .

I was about to turn on the light in the room when Ruzhana held back my hand and began quickly removing her gloves. Finally getting the better of her embarrassment she asked:

"Do you mean to go away, Ivanko? Do you really? . . . But you'll not go anywhere."

These were her first words. She uttered them hurriedly, with difficulty catching her breath.

I could not get a word out.

"Why don't you say something?" Ruzhana implored, her fingers lightly touching my hand. "Say something! Oughtn't I to have come, didn't you want to see me?"

"No. . . . I didn't want to see you," I said with an effort.

"That's not true." Ruzhana shook her head and there was reproach in her voice.

"No, it's not true. . . . But all the same I didn't. . . . It had been so hard to bear. . . ."

"It's hard work, Pan Belinets, and it's irregular."

"Never mind what it is!"

I clutched at the chance like a drowning man at a straw.

"It's unloading marble at the railway," said Lobanyi. "There's nothing else. But you shouldn't starve. Perhaps later on something better'll turn up."

It certainly was hard work—carrying blocks of marble from railway trucks in the rain and piercing wind, but I would have been glad to do even work like that had it not been for the waits of two or even three days between the deliveries. There were fifteen of us "fortunate" ones. From morning till night we hung about at the goods station, afraid of missing a train. We waited for hours on end, but we were paid only for the actual time we spent unloading.

A week passed, a second, a third—and there was no change. The few crowns which I earned were barely enough for food, yet I had to stretch them out somehow to cover the rent as well.

More and more often I began to ask myself whether I ought not to leave Uzhgorod.

The thought was unpleasant, and I tried to drive it away. Ruzhana was in Uzhgorod. True, I carefully avoided the places where I might meet her, but the very feeling that she was somewhere in the same town, that she walked the same streets, braced me. And where, if it came to that, could I go?

I would gaze for hours out of my window at the forested spurs of the Carpathians white with the January snow. Beyond the first range rose a second and a third. Higher and higher. Verkhovina, my dearly loved land, the land that reared me! Surely it cannot be true that I am unwanted here, that you have no use for me?

I was standing by that window one day, my forehead pressed to the cold glass. Darkness was descending and

the snow-covered ground was lighter than the sky. Far, far away in the mountains a single light burned. Suddenly the door opened gently behind me and a soft voice said: "Ivanko!"

I turned. Ruzhana stood in the doorway.

The room seemed actually lighter.

I took one step, another and a third towards Ruzhana. Then recollecting myself, by a great effort of will I halted and repressed a surge of joy.

Ruzhana who had made a step forward too, stopped short, as I did. Though I could not see her face in the dark I knew it bore a puzzled expression.

We stood motionless, facing each other in dead silence. Caught in a turmoil of emotion, I was warding off the memory of our last meeting, and of the bitterness with which I had left the Lembeis—without a word of encouragement from Ruzhana. If I could only forget. . . .

I was about to turn on the light in the room when Ruzhana held back my hand and began quickly removing her gloves. Finally getting the better of her embarrassment she asked:

"Do you mean to go away, Ivanko? Do you really? . . . But you'll not go anywhere."

These were her first words. She uttered them hurriedly, with difficulty catching her breath.

I could not get a word out.

"Why don't you say something?" Ruzhana implored, her fingers lightly touching my hand. "Say something! Oughtn't I to have come, didn't you want to see me?"

"No. . . . I didn't want to see you," I said with an effort.

"That's not true." Ruzhana shook her head and there was reproach in her voice.

"No, it's not true. . . . But all the same I didn't. . . . It had been so hard to bear. . . ."

"Yes, I know," Ruzhana interrupted me. "But I have not come to speak of what had happened between us. . . . Ivanko dear, I love you. We can't live apart. And that's why I've come. . . . For good. . . ."

I could not believe my ears.

"What did you say?"

"I've come for good," she repeated resolutely.

"That's impossible, Ruzhana," I said. "I've got nothing but two hands for which I can't find work."

"Is that all you're afraid of?"

From the way Ruzhana asked the question it was clear that she was afraid of something else, something that I may say. But I could not say anything. The bitterness and rancour roused by my memory of our last meeting had suddenly vanished.

"Yes, only that." My head sank on my chest.

Ruzhana came up close to me, and I could scent the fragrance of fresh frosty air she had brought in with her from the street.

"But I have hands too, my dear," she said. "Look—here they are. And they've been rather lucky. I've found some work. And I'm not going to leave you. Never again!"

38

We would leave home together in the morning. It was a cold winter, with frost and snow. I usually walked with Ruzhana to the wholesale book-dealer's where she filled the orders of country customers and wrote brief notes on new publications.

"Good-bye till evening, Ivanko!"

"Till evening!"

With a gay wave of the hand, she would disappear under the archway of the old grey building. I would wait until the tap of her heels died away and then go to the

goods station, wondering whether this would be a lucky day or not. When there was work, time went by fast; we cared little that the marble blocks were heavy, that the ropes on which we carried them from the trucks cut into our shoulders and rubbed our hands raw. Aching fatigue would come later, but what did it matter so long as we had work.

Ruzhana would be waiting for me when I came home at dusk.

"Is it you, Ivanko?"

"Yes, it's me, Ruzhana."

It was good to be together, and troubles seemed for a time to retire into the background. Even the "do without" days we observed regularly to save money for Gafia were no burden.

We usually stayed at home in the evenings, and our light burned long after midnight. Lobanyi came to see us, and occasionally Chonka would drop in.

"Ivan, have you any idea who 'G. I.' is?" Chonka asked on one of these occasions.

Ruzhana and I exchanged stolen glances.

"No, I've no idea. . . . Why?"

Chonka clasped his hands.

"My dear man, one would think you were living on the moon. Don't you ever look at anything but your wife?"

"Maybe I don't," I replied smiling.

"There's another of his articles in the *Karpatskaya Pravda* today," Chonka continued. "And doesn't he go for Latoritsa and the Agricultural Department! They can't deny a thing, they're caught with the goods every time. . . . Three cheers for the Reds! I've heard they've always got an editor on duty to take the rap if the police come. The censor strikes out some article and the editor prints it just the same and then waits for the police to come and take him off for defying the censor!"

"Is that true, Ivanko?" Ruzhana burst out in alarm. "Why didn't you tell me?" She caught my warning look and broke off in confusion.

Chonka started telling us eagerly about the latest article. I laughed inwardly—how well I knew every word, every comma in the articles signed "G. I."

Six weeks before that, Kurtinets had unexpectedly asked me to come to Prague, where he and František Stupa were trying to get Gorulya's case appealed. As Gorulya's adopted son, my presence, too, was needed. I pawned Ruzhana's gold watch—our only possession of any value—and left for the capital.

Kurtinets met me in František Stupa's office.

"We're going to make one more attempt, Pan Belinets," he said as we shook hands.

"What are the prospects?"

Kurtinets frowned.

"Not too hopeful. But we must seize our opportunity—I mean the fact that the government's concluded a treaty of mutual aid with the Soviet Union. They've had to ease up a little in their hounding of our Party. I don't know how long it'll last, but so far the Uzhgorod Court hasn't dared to support Matlakh's claim to the Studenitsa land.... Perhaps we'll manage to do something for Gorulya now...."

I spent a fortnight in Prague, a fortnight of persistent effort and suspense.... But all our work was in vain. The Supreme Court turned down the appeal, and Gorulya refused point-blank to send a plea for pardon to the President.

"I've done nothing wrong," he told Stupa when the latter visited him in prison. "I'm not going to get down on my knees to them. They'll have to wait a long time for that!"

Kurtinets and I returned in a gloomy mood, having accomplished nothing.

The train ran through the early morning mist towards Chop. We were alone in the compartment. Kurtinets sat deep in thought, smoking cigarette after cigarette.

Suddenly he looked at me.

"What do you think of doing now?" he asked.

I had been expecting the question, and I had my answer ready.

"I want to tell people about the actual cause of famine, about all those Matlakhs and Latoritsas and agricultural departments; I want to explode the myth of our land being too poor to feed the people who live on it. I don't know if I'm right, but that seems to me very important just now."

"It not only seems important, it *is* important," said Kurtinets. "Very important. Of course we're publishing things about the bankruptcy of the bourgeois agrarian policy, and the deterioration of agriculture, but just now what we need is this—" He paused for a moment, then went on: "To contrast all that with the development of agriculture in the Soviet Union, with the prospects the farmers have before them there, and to write about it—how shall I put it—in a concrete, practical, business-like style—forcefully, with facts and more facts. They speak for themselves. Could you give our paper a few articles like that?"

"Yes, Pan Kurtinets, that's what I've been thinking of doing."

"Splendid! If I remember rightly, you've got some material ready in your 'Memorandum on Verkhovina.'"

"That won't be enough," I said. "I'll need to have fresh material all the time."

"We can help you there. And the sooner you let us have your articles, the better. . . . Well, that's settled, but—" Kurtinets paused and looked at me,—"what are you going to live on? Our paper is unfortunately unable

to pay for the articles it prints, the money we get from sales and voluntary contributions barely covers the cost of paper and printing."

I flared up.

"Do you think I'm doing it for money? I'm not expecting payment. I..."

"Keep cool, keep cool," Kurtinets interrupted. "I spoke of money because without it you can't exist. Sooner or later your job of unloading marble will come to an end."

"Then I'll look for another job of some kind or other."

"An agronomist, an educated, trained man—and looking for something or other!" Kurtinets said with a bitter laugh.

"Is that any of my doing?"

Kurtinets made no reply. He stared silently out of the window at the clouds of steam from the engine. After a long pause he turned to me again.

"All the same, you've got to have the kind of work which would help you to keep up your research, or at least not hinder it."

"I don't need anything but a piece of land for experiments," I said. "I daren't dream of more than that just now."

"A piece of land!" said Kurtinets thoughtfully. "It's not so hard to rent that, it's a good deal harder to find work so that you'll have the means to rent it. Well, we'll have to look around."

The train slowed down, and dim station lights floated past the window.

"We've come to Chop," said Kurtinets and put his things together. He had to change there for the Mukachevo train.

This was what I remembered as I listened to Chonka.

The articles signed "G. I." were mine. I wrote them at night. Kurtinets got me the material for them, includ-

ing newspapers and books ordered from the U.S.S.R. through Svida's book-store. . . . This could now be done.

Ruzhana helped me, sitting up all night if necessary, to type my articles. We talked little, but in the brief time we allowed ourselves for rest she would sit down by me and tell me about her work, whom she had talked to and what about, and the orders which came in. She had a gift for making even the smallest thing sound interesting and I enjoyed listening to her, but all the same I often found my thoughts wandering. Ruzhana noticed it but was not offended or hurt. "Ivanko, where are your thoughts?" she only asked sadly.

I passed my hand over my face.

"Far away, Ruzhana."

"In Verkhovina?"

"Yes."

"You're very persistent," said Ruzhana thoughtfully. "You don't give up."

It was true—I did not want to give up, and my writing only increased my longing for my own work.

I still kept the small bags of seed which I had collected on the upland pastures—clover, wild oats, meum, rye grass—in a special drawer. One day I opened it and took out those bags, which Gafia had made me, remembering how she had cut them out of Gorulya's old shirt and sewn them up, sitting at the cottage door. My hands ached for the soil, the seeds. . . .

The thought of that bare slope behind the house kept coming to me. I even spoke about it to my landlady.

"My late husband and I thought of planting vines there," she said with a sigh. "Three hundred—it wouldn't have made a bad little vineyard for us, would it? . . . But then my husband died. . . . I wouldn't ask big rent, sir."

The sum she named actually was very moderate, but even so it was more than I could afford. I had to con-

tent myself by reading articles about agriculture in magazines and pamphlets on farming. Some I bought in Uzhgorod, others Jaroslav Marek sent me from Brno.

Sometimes I went to the wholesale book-dealer's firm where Ruzhana worked, to look through the new books. Svida was doing good business, there were plenty of orders, and although he knew that I was not a purchaser, he always made me welcome. One day I found him in a state of great excitement.

"Look at this, Pan Belinets!" he cried. "They've started to threaten me, how do you like that? They order me to stop selling Soviet books. This is the third letter I've had, threatening to raid my place. I suppose they want me to sell *Mein Kampf*! No, Pan Belinets, no! I'm an honest man and I'm not going to trade in war. I told the police as much."

"What did they say?"

"The police?" Svida shrugged his shoulders. "'Your store has not been raided yet, Pan Svida, you shouldn't worry about a few letters. We shall take steps.' That's all I got out of them! And what sort of steps are they taking, when only this morning a window was smashed in my Mukachevo branch! I begin to think it isn't me the police are protecting, but those bandits! What do you say, Pan Belinets?"

"I say that it's a bad business, and the Communists are right when they tell us that we've had enough of fine words about democracy, it's time for decisive action against the fascist scum."

Svida sighed.

"I don't meddle in politics, but I can't help agreeing with you; otherwise God knows where we'll end up. . . . But they needn't think they can frighten me! I don't want to lose the chance to make a decent living!"

Svida continued to go his own way, and the number of Soviet books in his store increased. When Ruzhana

brought me new volumes, the light burned in our room all night.

God, how I envied my Soviet colleagues, the scale of their experiments, the boldness of the ideas which they carried from the realm of theory to concrete fact. A bird caught in a snare must have the same feeling as it watches the flock soaring through the sky.

It was not only envy, however, that these books brought—they gave me new ideas.

That was how I began to think about meum—that aromatic umbellate plant—which the mountain shepherds call “magic grass.” It could make a stone produce milk, as Gorulya used to say, but of all grasses it was least able to stand the rigours of our mountain climate and was seldom found in the upland pastures. I remember as a child hearing the shepherds sigh: “Oh, if only God would give it strength!”

This was what filled my mind—how to give meum the quality of endurance which it lacked.

I had planned a whole series of experiments, but I had no place to carry them out, and the thought of getting even a tiny plot of land haunted me day and night.

Ruzhana always met me in the passage when I came home, but one day I was surprised not to see her there. I opened the door of our room softly and found that she had a lady visitor. They were sitting by the stove, engrossed in talk. As the door creaked they turned, and I saw that her companion was Anna Kurtinets.

“At last!” she cried. “I was afraid I might have to leave before you came!”

“We even thought of going to look for you at the goods station,” said Ruzhana.

I was very glad indeed to see Anna. I quickly threw off my coat and hat and joined them by the stove.

"Olexa asked me to give you a letter," Anna said after the usual exchange of questions between people who meet rarely. Then she opened her bag and took out an envelope, sealed but not addressed. "You must take this to the Regional Forestry Board and give it to the head forester Zdenek himself. He knows all about you. It's about a job for you. That's all."

She smiled and handed me the envelope.

It was only when Anna Kurtinets had left that I remembered I had forgotten to thank her. Even after she had gone, I could not properly grasp what had happened. "It's about a job for you..."

I could hardly wait for morning to hurry to the Forestry Board. A tall Czech with hair turning grey at the temples met me. This, it turned out, was the head forester Zdenek himself. He silently took the sheet of paper out of the envelope and read it unhurriedly. The note was a short one, only a few lines.

"Yes, I know about you." Zdenek examined me through his large glasses. "I can offer you the post of forest inspector. Of course it's not your profession, but I hope you won't find it difficult... I'll introduce you to the manager now, and then tomorrow you can start work. As for references, Pan Belinets," he paused, "I'll say that I've got them."

I wrung his hand. My grateful look must have been more eloquent than any words.

Joy lent me wings and I ran rather than walked back to Ruzhana. She had stopped at home that day and was waiting for me. But I passed our own gate and rang first at the door of the house near by where our landlady lived.

"You remember the piece of land we talked about?" I burst out almost before she had time to open the door.

"Yes, I remember."

"You haven't changed your mind about renting it?"

"No."

"Then I want to use that slope."

I must have looked strange, perhaps wild. My landlady gave me an apprehensive look and consented hurriedly.

39

My work at the Forestry Board was not difficult and I could take my time over it; I quickly found my feet, and not only Zdenek but the manager himself was pleased with me.

I often had to make the rounds of the forests. I enjoyed these trips, especially when they brought me near Studenitsa and I could spend a day or two with Gafia.

Since Gorulya's trial, my adopted mother's health had become noticeably worse. She would not admit it, forced herself to be very active and cheerful when other people were about and assured me that she felt much better. When I took her to the doctor in Uzhgorod, however, I heard a different story, and I knew that her days with us were numbered.

Ruzhana and I tried to persuade her to come and live with us in Uzhgorod, but she would not even hear of it.

"Nay, children, and what about the house? And the stock?"

"What stock is there?" asked Ruzhana. "And the house can be boarded up."

"Board up the house?" Gafia was horrified at the bare thought. "And if Ilko comes home—and everything's boarded up!... Nay, nay, I couldn't think of it!"

My visits were great events for her. I would spend the day in the forest, and in the evening, refusing the cordial invitations of the foresters, hurry home to Stu-

denitsa. Gafia was always waiting up for me, no matter how late it was.

As we rested in the dusk, she would tell me about the past, about how she had been married to Gorulya who loved my mother. It was in the past that she lived, the present hardly existed for her. But strangely enough in all her recollections there was not a note of bitterness or blame for Gorulya.

"They loved each other, Ivanko, eh, how they loved each other!" said Gafia. "But your grandad didn't want to give his girl to a beggar. . . . They wanted to run away and get married in secret, but they were caught. . . . Ilko still has Maria's wedding-ring. Take it when I die, Ivanko, it's in that chest, right at the bottom, wrapped in a cloth—a silver ring."

Gafia died just before spring. Her death was as hard as her whole life had been. I stayed with her to the end.

"What'll happen, Ivanko?" she said in a breaking voice. "Ilko'll come back and I won't be here. . . . Tell him, Ivanko, tell him. . . ."

But what I was to tell him she never said.

I buried her beside my mother in the stony Studenitsa cemetery.

They now repose side by side, these two women, of whom it is said among the people that their hearts, even as the sun, give warmth to all living things on earth.

Spring came swiftly as it always does in the Carpathians. As soon as the snow thawed on the slope behind the house and the brown earth showed through, my busy time began. I cleared away the many boulders scattered over the slope and dug it up from top to bottom. I would come home from work, bolt my supper and hurry out to my "field."

I brought hazel bushes from the forest and planted them across the slope in rows to prevent the rain from washing away the soil.

"Good heavens!" cried Chonka. "All that fuss about a miserable hill-side! It's not worth the work! If you want to grow anything decent, why don't you rent land that is land, and not a bit of God-knows-what like this!"

"I've told him the same," Ruzhana said. "But you know how obstinate he is!"

"Can't you understand?" I cried, losing patience. "Any fool can get a decent crop off good land, but it takes some doing with this."

Lobanyi came several times to help me turn over the soil. He took off his jacket, spat on his hands white with ingrained marble dust, and set to eagerly with pick or spade.

When the bushes were planted, I had to wait for the time to start sowing. I divided the slope into plots and each of these into sections, giving them various portions of fertilizer. In these sections I intended to sow meum combined with clover, wild oats and those poisonous scourges of the mountain meadows—hellebore and mountain sorrel.

At last the day came when the seed lay in the sun-warmed earth. The first growth came up evenly, strongly, a joy to my heart. In a week or so the whole slope from top to bottom was green, and the morning sun sparkled with a myriad tints on the dew.

"You're splendid, Ivanko!" Ruzhana said, when I had delivered her quite a lecture one day on meum and my observations. "Splendid! It's a banner, say what you will—a small one maybe, but a banner, and you've kept it flying!"

Once Ruzhana brought me several copies of the Soviet illustrated magazine *U.S.S.R. in Construction*.¹

I gazed for a long time at each picture and read the captions over and over again. A heading on the last page—"The Story of an Experiment"—attracted my

¹ This magazine is now called *Soviet Union*.—Tr.

attention. I began to read, breathless with the scale and importance of what was told in a few lines.

It was an account of an experiment carried out by a Soviet agronomist, Roman Alexeyevich Shcherbina, who wanted to raise the yield of millet. To shorten the time needed for experiments, he conducted them in hotbeds made for him by a collective farm. He took off three crops a year instead of one, and in the end found what he was seeking. The new method, however, had to be tested under field conditions at various latitudes. Shcherbina applied to the Agricultural Academy. The Academy in turn appealed to the farmers, and seven hundred and thirty collective farms in various parts of the country undertook to repeat the experiment on their fields.

A man of about my own age with a friendly face looked out at me from the page, his eyes screwed up against the sun, holding up a big sheaf with heavily hanging ears.

We gazed at each other, the man in the picture and I.

"How I envy you, Agronomist Shcherbina," I said to him in my thoughts. "Not your success, but the life which gives you your opportunity."

"I understand," he seemed to answer. "I understand you very well. But you mustn't give up. Do you really know everything about your soil? Have you investigated all its possibilities, the potentialities of its grasses and cereals?"

With the magazine still in my hand, I left the house; I do not remember how I got there, but a few minutes later I was standing before the slope. My excitement increased, but my mind worked clearly, with cool precision.

I did not possess the envied opportunities of a Soviet agronomist, I could hope for no collective-farm fields, no

government support. I was alone on a narrow trail—an agronomist working by himself. But this trail, the only road I had so far, I resolved to follow cost what it might.

40

There were twenty of them, twenty peasants in various Verkhovina villages, young and old, who became my devoted helpers, or, as I jestingly called them, my "correspondents."

In the autumn I went to see them, without any very great hopes that they would agree to help me. After all, what mattered my plans and schemes to these men absorbed in the struggle for existence? They had plenty of troubles of their own, why should they take on an extra burden—to sow various mixtures of grasses and wheat and then watch their development?

That was what I told myself time and again, but nevertheless I went to them because deep in my heart I believed in these people.

Some of them I had met on my frequent inspection tours, others had known me as a child.

The first man I spoke to was Semyon Rushchak. He and his daughter Kalinka were still working for Matlakh; people said that the only reason why Matlakh had not sacked Semyon after the hunger-march was because he was an expert at his job; actually, it was mainly he who kept the farm going.

It was a Sunday and I found Semyon Rushchak at home. We had not met for a long time and were delighted to see each other.

Semyon had to hurry off to the farm, and I volunteered to walk over with him. It was still light, however, and his wife was afraid that Matlakh might see me.

"Aye, he's fair raging against you," said Semyon, "I don't know what would happen if he saw you!" His

eagerness to show me the fruits of his work, however, overcame his apprehensions. "It makes no odds," he said with a wink. "We won't go by the road but by the path and across the stream. Do you remember how to cross over by a tree-trunk?"

...It was dusk when we came to the farm. The men there all knew me and each came up to say a word or two.

"Mind now, not a word to Matlakh!" Semyon warned them.

"What d'you take us for?" the men protested, offended.

Semyon lighted a lantern and took me to the cow-houses. Before entering, however, he called an old man and said to him: "If the boss turns up, Grandad, come and tell us quick. Understand?"

"All right," the old man wheezed. "I'll keep an eye open for him!"

"Why, does Matlakh come at night?" I asked Semyon.

"The old devil's like a flea on a hot shovel. He's never still."

Once inside the cow-house, however, Matlakh was forgotten. Semyon took me from stall to stall, calling each cow by its name.

"That's Mitsa, Ivanko," he said. "You remember her? And here's her daughter. And here's the best of all." Semyon's voice dropped to a whisper. "You remember what you told me?... I managed it."

Semyon raised the lantern higher and I saw a greyish-brown cow.

"Ours! Carpathian!"

"Aye, it's ours," said Semyon and called: "Pcholka!" Pcholka turned her heavy handsome head from the feed-rack and lowed softly.

I remembered how I had urged Matlakh to start a herd of the Carpathian breed. But he wouldn't hear of it.

"If we improve the brown breed," I explained, "it can be quite as good as the Swiss, perhaps even better."

"Why bother when we can get good cattle already bred?" Matlakh objected stubbornly. "Time's money."

"Did you talk him round?" I asked Semyon.

"I didn't even try." Rushchak laughed grimly, holding out a handful of hay to Pcholka. "We fooled him, Kalinka and I."

"Fooled Matlakh?"

"Why not? After you talked about our brown cows, Ivanko, I just waited for a chance to try what I could do with them, and I got it. Medunitsa calved, a good cow she is, Swiss. Well, we hid the calf from Matlakh, said the wolves had got it. Then I took that Swiss calf to Volovets and exchanged it. I soon found a man glad enough to give me a brown Carpathian cow for it—and that's Pcholka! Pcholka herself! We took her to the farm and I told Matlakh: 'I found this on our field, what'll I do with it?' 'Shut it up,' he says, 'till the owner comes for it, and then he'll have to pay a fine.' That was just what I wanted!" Semyon laughed. "It's seven months now and the owner's not come. Careless, he is, eh? Matlakh once told me to slaughter her, but then I showed him a bucket of her milk. It would be a sin to slaughter a cow like that. So he let her be. . . . She's better than some of the Swiss! We've worked hard with her, Kalinka and I, milking her carefully, choosing her feed, trying to think of everything she can want. . . . And now look at her! . . . That's all thanks to you, Ivanko, and I thank you for it."

"What for?"

"For giving me the idea."

"I gave you the idea, but all it does is put some extra crowns in Matlakh's pocket."

Semyon's only answer was a snort.

"That's how it goes," I thought bitterly. "Whatever you look at here, whatever you touch, it's all Semyon's and Kalinka's work, and a bit of my knowledge too, and Semyon and I have to creep in secretly, like thieves. . . ."

We sat down on milking-stools in the passageway between the stalls. The lantern on the floor before us was smoking, but neither of us moved to turn down the wick. I could see that Semyon was downcast, and decided to tell him the purpose of my visit at once.

He listened to what I had to say and brightened visibly.

"So you haven't dropped it, Ivanko?" he said sympathetically.

"You can see I haven't."

"Aye, it's stuck in your mind, I can see that."

Only now did Semyon turn down the wick. He thought for a moment.

"I'll give you a bit o' my land," he said. "And we'll do something with that meum on Matlakh's too. And if it's high land you're needing, you'd better go to old Fyodor Skripka. You won't find higher land than his anywhere."

"I thought he'd two strips by the stream," I said. "That's not so high."

"He had, but he hasn't," Semyon growled. "Matlakh got his claws on them in the end. Gave Skripka other land instead. Right up on top. Skripka moved his hut up and all."

"Where are his children?" I asked.

"Here, there and everywhere," said Semyon. "The oldest went to America, that's Mikhailo. He's only got the youngest with him, and that one's sick."

I did not expect much from Fyodor Skripka, but I decided to visit him just the same.

Semyon fixed me up for the night on some hay in a shed. As soon as day broke I said good-bye to him and

climbed the path through the woods, familiar from childhood, leading to the saddle where Skripka's cottage now stood.

* * *

"Why, look who's come, eh, you're a rare visitor!"

Old Skripka did not know which way to turn. He slapped his thighs like a cock flapping its wings, and called his wife: "Hey, old woman, where've you got to? Pan Agronomist's come to see us!"

Skripka's wife, Anna, tall and heavily built, showed no sign of sharing her husband's rejoicing over the visit of Pan Agronomist, although Pan Agronomist was the son of her girlhood friend.

"Take a seat," she said morosely.

I sat down. Skripka seated himself on the edge of a plank shelf that served as a bed and showered me with questions about Gorulya.

"They shut him up, my old friend. An eagle in a cage! There's no right or justice on this earth, Ivan, nay, there's none!"

All the time Skripka sighed and lamented, the old woman stood in the doorway, shutting off the mountain tops golden in the morning sunshine, her eyes boring into me. But in spite of her grim, inimical look, she was clearly burning with curiosity to know what had brought me up here at this early hour.

I explained why I had come, and disappointment was written plain on the old woman's face. Skripka, however, showed an unexpected delight.

"You hear that, Anna?" he said, clapping his hands together. "My land's worth something, now what d'you say to that?..."

"There's no plough-land in the whole district higher than yours," I said.

"That's right enough," Skripka agreed. "The only one

that ploughs and sows higher than me's the Lord God in His heaven."

"And I suppose it's good money Pan Agronomist gets for it?" Anna boomed out.

"Pan Agronomist isn't paid anything for it," I answered.

Skipka stared unbelievably.

"Nay, man, you wouldn't take all that trouble if the gentry weren't paying you well for it."

"It's not for the gentry I'm working, *Vuiku* Fyodor."

"Who, then?"

"For the sake of science."

"But that means the gentry," Skipka concluded simply.

"No!" I cried hotly. "It's not for the gentry, it's for the people!"

All thought of the help I wanted from Skipka left my mind as I eagerly explained to this old couple, driven by injustice and poverty on to a stony patch of mountain land, about the mighty powers of science. I told them about grasses which make barren land fertile, about meum, about the Carpathian cow Pcholka and the new kinds of fruit which Jaroslav Marek had raised in Brno.

Skipka sat listening, his hands pressed between his knees. Anna stood motionless in the doorway as though she had taken root there.

"Maybe all that's right," said Skipka after a long pause. "But I've never yet seen science help the common folks. What I've seen is that science comes and takes the bit they've got!... Come over here," he beckoned, "come on, it's all right." I went up to the bed. Skipka rose, and only then I saw that somebody was lying on it, covered with a rough homespun quilt. Skipka turned back the edge, and two feverish, burning eyes looked up at me. It was hard to say whether they belonged to old age or youth; it was only when I looked more closely at the

haggard, yellow, almost transparent face that I guessed this was Skripka's son.

"That's my lad," the old man said and sighed. "He won't see another spring. . . . Last year I took him to Svalyava, to a doctor there. A very learned doctor! He looked at him and said: 'You'll have to put that lad o' yours in a hospital, then he'll get well.' 'And how long will he be there, Pan Doctor?' I asked him, and he says: 'Half a year.' Now where's Fyodor Skripka to get the money for that, Ivan? D'you think I'd have grudged it if I could have got it? . . . Well, so I just had to bring him home again. . . . He was up and about till spring, and then he took to his bed and he's been lying there like that ever since. It's his chest, you can see for yourself what he's like, and he's only eighteen!"

The boy opened dry, cracked lips to gasp for air. Then he turned to the wall.

I looked at the dying lad and felt bitter shame at my own impotence. But what could I do for him? Only too well I knew that he was doomed. How many there were like him, dying in Verkhovina cottages! "Why have I come here to worry people with my needs when they're in such bitter grief?" I asked myself.

I glanced at Anna. She stood motionless on the same spot; her face was sombre, impenetrable, as though carved in stone, with two tears running down her cheeks.

"Well, there's naught to be done, Ivan," said Skripka, straightening the covering and sitting down again on the edge of the bed. "I mean about my lad. . . . But I'll let you have a bit of my land. Only tell me what you want me to do with it. . . . I haven't enough with it and I haven't enough without it, it's all the same. What d'you say, old woman?" and he turned to his wife.

Anna wiped her face with the corner of her shawl.

"Why not?" she said. "If others can do it, we can too."

I planted my seeds on twenty tiny patches of land in various parts of Verkhovina—furrows running alongside boundaries, corners of fields and small clear spaces among the boulders on waste-land. Soon the patches were covered with green, and wheat and rye pushed up their heads—at first weakly, timidly, as though testing their strength, and then, to the amazement of many, formed ears.

Semyon Rushchak and Fyodor Skripka of Studenitsa, Stefan Popovich of Potoki, Mikhailo Strizhak and Petro Tsifra of Volovets, the blacksmith Svyatinya of Lyuta and others tended these experimental crops, saw to it that they were not washed away, weeded them, and faithfully observed the exact dates for every process. At first they merely carried out my instructions, but soon they themselves were caught by the restless spirit of the experimenter.

"Have you put a spell on me?" Skripka would ask whenever I paid him a visit during my rounds of the forests. "I've forgotten how to look up at the sky. All the time I keep looking under my feet and thinking: 'Now why does the grass grow this way and not that way?'"

One day I even received a letter from Skripka, written for him by somebody on a dirty piece of paper in a large, uneven hand that wandered all over the page.

"This is Fyodor Skripka writing to you from the pasture, and I wish you good health. I am quite well, the Mother of God be praised, and I am tending the cattle. My old woman is looking after your bit of land. There is only the two of us now, my boy is gone, he's dead.

"Ivanko, there is something I have seen up here on the pasture. When the sheep stale on that cursed sorrel

that chokes all the other grass, then the sorrel dries up and it only grows again later on. And I don't want it to grow at all. So I got together some sheep's stale and poured it over that cursed weed, and when it dried up, I sowed meum where it had been. And now I want to tell you that the meum has come up well, and when the sorrel tried to grow again it was the meum that choked it. I have fenced off that bit so that the cattle, Mother of God prevent it, won't trample it. Come and take a look at it, and I shall keep on with it."

I waited impatiently between my rounds of the forests. I made my way to my assistants sometimes on forestry horses, sometimes on carts going my way, but mainly on foot. My knapsack held samples of soil and note-books—one for each experimental patch—in which I jotted down everything I myself observed and everything told to me by my voluntary helpers.

Time went too slowly for me, I packed into it everything I could. I had built a green-house at the foot of the slope behind our house in town, where I could continue my work in the winter. I was a regular subscriber to Soviet magazines at Svida's store and corresponded with my teacher, Professor Marek, asking his advice and telling him my observations and ideas.

Marek printed a number of my letters about experiments with meum in two issues of a magazine which he was now publishing in Brno. These letters brought sharp attacks on the magazine and on me from well-established, or, as Marek called them, "fossilized" professors at the Agricultural College. They even criticized my letters in an agricultural periodical published in Prague, indignant that there should be an agronomist who dared to doubt the permanence and immutability of the hereditary qualities of plants, dared to assert merely on the basis of his own observations that by changing the environment it is possible to effect changes in the organism.

"We would like to inquire of Professor Marek," they wrote, "whether his magazine serves science or politics?"

Kurtinets gave me the article when I visited him in Mukachevo on my way back to Uzhgorod from a tour of the outlying forests.

"My word, it's a regular hornets' nest I've stirred up!" I said, frowning.

"Well, aren't you pleased?" asked Kurtinets, his eyes twinkling.

"I'm pleased all right, only I never thought it would sting them so hard."

"You thought wrong," said Kurtinets. "Do you really imagine it's science they're worrying about? Of course it isn't! You've taken a whack at the idea of 'immutability.' That's what has got those high priests of 'pure science' in such a stew. . . . After all, what are their attacks if not politics?" He thought for a moment, then added: "Everything progressive infuriates them. I don't mean just these men of learning, they're only part of that dark force which threatens to descend upon the people at any moment, bringing terrible calamity. The people must stand together now as never before."

I listened to Kurtinets eagerly. We met frequently now, and after every talk with him my thoughts were clearer, broader, as though—as Gorulya had once put it—a light were turned up higher inside me.

Every spare moment I spent on my plot of land. It was not very large, but there was plenty to do—in fact, there were times when I could not get through everything alone, and then Ruzhana came to help me. We had to live very thriftily. Money was needed for the land, and for books, and for the green-house. To make ends meet, Ruzhana continued working at the book-store. This, combined with housekeeping, kept her pretty well occupied, but nevertheless she found a few hours to help me.

All this new, absorbing work brought me no little

joy, but at the back of my mind there was always an uneasy sense of anxiety, part of that general anxiety that gripped the people of our country with a premonition of implacably advancing calamity.

The rise behind our house gave a wide view, and I found that I had acquired the habit when I mounted it of peering anxiously round the horizon. There, hidden in the distance, lay the Hungary of Horthy, the Rumania of the boyars, Beck's Poland, and westward, beyond the Sudetic Mountains—Hitler's Germany.

Never before had I been so conscious of their proximity. Swamped with the foul waters of fascism, these countries seemed to be crowding in on our little Czechoslovakia, and the stench was right at our frontiers.

Everybody followed the course of events in these neighbouring countries, especially in Germany and Hungary—some with disgust and contempt, others with fear, but all were watchfully alert.

More and more often refugees from the savagery, violence, and mediaeval barbarism made their way secretly across the border into our small island still rising above the swamp of fascism. We sought out these people, talked to them, heard their stories of the brutality of the storm-troopers, of the war psychosis, the death camps where thousands of innocent people were imprisoned and tortured. We shuddered at the thought that all this was happening quite close by, that we, too, lay in the shadow of this danger.

Just before leaving the Forestry Board one day, I was called to the telephone. I picked up the receiver and a strange voice addressed me with a stealthy politeness.

"A thousand apologies, Pan Belinets, for troubling you. Might I ask you to come to the police station for a few minutes, room number six? When? Preferably today,

as soon as possible. . . . Thank you. A thousand apologies for troubling you."

It can well be imagined how this telephone call agitated me. The police had never sent for me before. What did they want with me now?

I left the office, filled with vague apprehension. It occurred to me that I ought to warn Ruzhana, but she was not feeling very well (we were expecting our first child) and I did not want to upset her.

Room number six.

A police captain whose age I could not tell rose from behind the table to greet me.

"Please sit down, Pan Belinets," he invited me politely.

I took a chair standing by the desk, without a single paper or even an ink-well on it; apparently its only purpose was to serve as a barrier between the official and visitors.

"You come from Verkhovina, I understand, Pan Belinets? From Studenitsa, isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's correct," I answered.

"A very pretty village! I remember when I was a boy scout we passed through it on one of our marches. If I'm not mistaken, there is a mineral spring not far away?"

"Not just one," I answered, "there's quite a number."

"I only remember one," said the captain, leaning back. "We camped by it. The water seethed as though it were in a kettle. We kept on drinking and drinking it. . . . It quenched our thirst wonderfully, but it gave us a hell of an appetite. . . . Tell me, Pan Belinets," he interrupted himself and the wistful smile that accompanied his childhood recollections vanished, "did you know well the villager Ilko Gorulya, who used to be Count Schönborn's gamekeeper?"

My hands trembled and a chill stole over me.

"Yes, I knew him," I said as calmly as I could.

"Is he a relation of yours?" asked the captain, leaning over the table with his eyes fixed on my face.

"No, we're not related."

"But he brought you up, I think, isn't that right?"

"Yes. He took me to live with him when my mother died."

"And when did you see him last?"

"In Brno," I said.

"At the trial?"

I nodded.

The captain opened a drawer in the table, took out a sheet of paper and handed it to me.

"And have you ever seen him, Pan Belinets, looking like that?"

A photograph of a man with a shaven head was pasted on the corner of the paper. It was Gorulya. My heart missed a beat—was something wrong?

"Has anything happened to him?" I asked anxiously.

"Don't you know yourself, Pan Belinets, what has happened?"

"I only know that he was sentenced," I said hoarsely.

"And I know nothing more of him either." The captain smiled. "But tell me, Pan Belinets, you've never seen him looking like this?"

"No, never."

"Well, that's all right, then!" said the captain, putting the paper with the photograph back into the drawer. "I wouldn't presume to doubt you." Then without even a pause he leaned forward over the table and added insinuatingly: "And if you do hear anything, may I rely upon your letting me know?"

I barely restrained my self-control.

"Who do you take me for, Captain?"

"I take you for a civil servant, Pan Belinets, under oath to the republic!"

A long pause followed. At last the captain pushed his chair back from the table.

"I am very sorry," he said with his polite smile, "yes, very sorry indeed that we have not been able to come to an understanding. I will not detain you any longer."

Filled with alarm, I went home and told Ruzhana about my conversation with the police captain.

"Something's happened to Gorulya," I said, pacing up and down the room. "Or else something's going to happen."

"Why do you think so?" said Ruzhana, trying to calm me, although she could not conceal her own anxiety.

"Why should the police send for me? Why?"

Then light broke in on me.

"He's escaped! That's it! Gorulya's escaped!"

"What!" cried Ruzhana excitedly. "Do you really think he's managed it?"

The only person who could give the answer was Kurtinets, and my first impulse was to hurry to him at once. I remembered, however, that I might be shadowed, and decided to wait a few days.

Time hung heavily on my hands. The days were endless, and whatever I did, the thought of Gorulya never left me.

Early one morning I decided that I might at last go to Kurtinets. He was now living in Uzhgorod, in the old part of the city.

My appearance at such an early hour was a surprise, but I had the feeling he guessed what had brought me.

"The police sent for me a few days ago," I said, my heart beating.

"I know," Kurtinets answered quietly. "And they asked you about Gorulya, I suppose?"

"Yes," I answered, astonished to find him so well informed. "It was Gorulya they asked about. . . . Has he escaped?"

"Who told you that?"

"I'm hoping you'll tell me."

A long pause followed.

"All right," said Kurtinets, nodding. "After all, why should I conceal it from you? Gorulya's free."

Joy filled me, mingled with a certain alarm. I pelted Kurtinets with questions which he answered briefly, rather unwillingly, and when I asked him to help me see Gorulya, he shook his head.

"You mustn't ask that."

"Don't you trust me?"

"It isn't a case of trusting you, it's a case of Gorulya's safety. You ought to understand that."

"I do."

"For the present it's impossible."

"But later on?"

Kurtinets shook his head dubiously, and I realized that it was no use insisting. All the same, the hope to see Gorulya did not leave me.

One Sunday Ruzhana and I went out for a walk on the boulevard by the river. As usual on Sundays and holidays, a good many other people were doing the same. Shopkeepers, wine-makers, officials and commercial travellers had come out with their families to get a breath of fresh air.

We met Chonka and his wife, who joined us. Julia had recently made peace with Ruzhana, but she still looked askance at me.

As we strolled up and down, I noticed that we kept meeting a stocky man in a baggy suit that looked as though it had been made for somebody else. Now and then he caught my eye and stared so hard that I involuntarily looked away.

At a turn I stopped for a moment to light a cigarette. As I held the match to it, a quiet voice beside me said: "Will you give me a light, please?"

I looked up. The man who had stared at me held a cigarette to my match, touched his hat with two fingers and asked: "If I'm not mistaken, it's Pan Belinets?" and without waiting for an answer, muttered quickly: "Step aside a little, I want to speak to you."

"Certainly," I said undecidedly. "But I must tell my wife first."

The man nodded.

I overtook Ruzhana, told her that I would rejoin her in a minute and went back to the stranger.

We turned off the boulevard into a quiet side-street. There my companion stopped and slipped a note into my hand.

I was so excited that as I opened it, I all but dropped it.

The note contained only a few words written in an awkward, familiar handwriting that caught my heart.

"Ivan, son, if you want to see me, trust this man."

There was no signature. But was any necessary for me to know that the note came from Gorulya?

"Where is he? How is he?" I almost shouted, forgetful of caution.

"Quiet, there are people around, Pan Belinets," said the stranger, frowning.

He took the note from me and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now listen carefully," he went on. "Tomorrow at nine by the small station. . . . Don't approach me. Take a ticket to Stavny. See which coach I get into, and take the same one. Tell your wife that you're going on an inspection tour. . . . Not a soul must know anything about this. . . . You understand?"

"Yes, of course."

"That's good," he said, a little less tersely. "Go on with your walk, and remember—nothing has happened."

He tipped his hat again and walked away in the opposite direction from the boulevard. I turned back and found Ruzhana and the others. It cost me no little effort to look unperturbed.

42

As Uzhgorod was left farther behind, the stations became few and far between. The train ran through narrow valleys in the heart of the mountains towards the Uzhok Pass, a short distance from the Polish frontier.

The windows rattled, the engine emitted a shrill whistle and its echo rolled back along the mountains with a trail of smoke.

The day was drawing in and the coach was in semi-darkness. A fresh cool breath came in through the open windows.

People kept getting out at each station until the coach was half empty. A few solitary passengers dozed in their corners. My guide was sitting by a window, two seats in front of me. All I could see of him was his back. He had never once glanced at me, never even turned round, but I felt an intangible link between us. I watched him, ready to follow any move he might make.

I did not know exactly where we were to leave the train, although my ticket was to Stavny.

Every now and then alarming ideas would mingle with my feverishly racing thoughts. Suppose this were a trap? Suppose the police officer had a hand in it? But the letter? How could I mistake Gorulya's writing?...

I remembered the court-house in Brno, and Gorulya's words: "If I escape from your prison, and escape I shall, I give you my word for that...."

It was now quite dark in the coach. I could barely see the man to whom I had entrusted myself—perhaps

too rashly. Suddenly I felt rather than saw him stir, then rise. I rose too. He went out on the platform at the end of the coach. I followed him.

The platform was empty. The man said in my ear: "I hope you're not afraid to jump off while the train's still moving before we get to the station. There'll be an ascent and the train will slow down."

Sure enough, the train began to lose speed. My companion opened the outer door and descended to the lower step.

"Stand here beside me," he said. "I'll jump first."

I went down to the last step and waited, clinging to the rail. The engine puffed as it pulled the train slowly up the slope.

"Now!" said my companion.

He let go and jumped down to the embankment. I could hear the gravel crunch under his feet. I held my breath and jumped too. . . .

Everything went well. The last coaches had not yet passed when my companion found me in the darkness, took my arm and quickly drew me aside.

"There's a path here," he said. "Go straight along it, I'll catch up."

I could barely see the path in the darkness. It led away from the railway, first winding among the bushes, then climbing straight up through the forest. I felt my way forward, bumping into trees.

It was only some ten minutes later that I heard footsteps and stopped to let my companion overtake me.

"It's all right," he said. "I don't think we've got anybody on our tail."

"Why, was there a danger of that?"

"I had a feeling somebody was after us. That's why I decided to jump before we got to the station, and waited to let the train go by. . . . Step along, Pan Belinets. It's pitch dark, but never mind, we'll fix that."

He took a white handkerchief out of his pocket and tucked a corner of it into his collar at the back. That white patch led me through the darkness until we came to a lonely forest ranger's hut....

The first person I saw on entering the neat living-room was Kurtinets. He rose from a broad bench to meet me.

"So you've got here all right, I see," he said as we shook hands.

I cannot recall what I answered. I was thinking of someone else, but that someone was not to be seen.

My restless glances around did not escape Kurtinets. Gently he led me to the bench.

"Sit down and rest a bit," he said, "you've had a difficult journey, especially on such a dark night."

In addition to Kurtinets and my guide, the dim yellow light of a small oil-lamp showed me one more man, evidently the forest ranger himself. He stood leaning against the door-jamb, and I could see that he was listening tensely, ready to catch the least sound in the silence outside. Kurtinets turned to him.

"Imre! It's after eleven," he said in Hungarian. "You can waken him."

Imre nodded to my guide and they left the cottage, shutting the door behind them.

"All this must be very unexpected," Kurtinets said when we were alone.

"Yes and no," I replied.

"Gorulya's wanted to see you for a long time, but we waited, we didn't want to be in too great a hurry in arranging a meeting."

"Does that mean the danger's past?"

"Oh, no, not at all!" said Kurtinets. "There's danger at every step. They're searching for him, searching everywhere. Gorulya's got a long and difficult journey ahead of him."

I wanted to ask Kurtinets what journey that was and how I could help. But I held the words back, knowing that I would get no answer.

Then the door creaked, and Gorulya entered.

We rushed to embrace each other and stood for a long time together in the middle of the room.

"So you haven't forgotten me, Ivanko?" Gorulya whispered.

"No, Father, I haven't forgotten you," I said, calling him Father for the first time. "And I never shall. . . ."

At last we sat down on the bench. We were alone, the others had gone out.

"Let me have a good look at you," said Gorulya, taking me by the shoulders and holding me at a distance from himself.

"It's wonderful, you being free again," I said after a pause.

"It isn't freedom yet, Ivanko, that lies ahead."

"But how did you manage it?"

Gorulya laughed grimly.

"I'm a man of my word. I got away at night. Well, there were good people to help, of course. . . . But what's it matter how I got away—I did it and that's all! . . . And how are you getting along?" he asked softly.

"It's difficult to tell you it all in two words," I said helplessly.

"No matter if it's difficult, so long as it isn't shameful. . . . I've heard all about it, everything. . . . Olexa gave me the newspapers where you hit out at those wolves. You gave 'em a good rap over the nose all right!" cried Gorulya gaily. "Good lad, that's the way I like!" He glanced at my face. "And your wife, I've heard tell she's a fine lass. I saw that myself when you brought her to us. . . . Well, what's it going to be—a grandson or a grand-daughter?"

"We both want a boy."

"You'd keep the girl too, wouldn't you?" said Gorulya with an abrupt laugh. "Eh, but Gafia would have been happy. She loved you like a son. . . . You were there when she died, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was there."

Gorulya sighed heavily.

"It wasn't an easy life she had with me. . . . Well, you give your wife my regards. We may meet again some day."

"But you're going away, *Vuiku!*" I said sadly.

"Where did you get that, that I'm going?" said Gorulya, looking hard at me.

"Kurtinets told me."

"Ah, Olexa! . . . Well, it's right, I am going. . . . It's a long journey, Ivan, over the pass, through Poland, over there. . . ." and he waved his hand towards the east.

So that was where he was setting off that night! How I envied him!

"I'll go with you to the pass!"

"No," Gorulya shook his head. "We'd better say good-bye here."

"Haven't I a right to go a bit of the way with you?"

Gorulya hesitated.

"I don't know, Ivanko, I don't know. It'll have to be as my comrades say. I'm in their hands. . . ."

"Then I'll ask Kurtinets myself."

"All right, you ask him," Gorulya said with a wink. "I'd be glad to have you with me a bit of the way. Who knows when I'll see you again!"

Kurtinets allowed me to go only to the top of the hill against which the forest ranger's cottage stood.

"No farther," he said.

I had no idea then that Gorulya was going to the Soviet Union not alone, but with a group of Czech and Hungarian Communists. That was why Olexa Kurtinets

was there; the Central Committee had entrusted him with the job of seeing them over the border.

At two in the morning Imre Gevizi, the forest ranger, Gorulya and I set off. I asked where Kurtinets was, and was told he had gone ahead.

We climbed in single file up the steep, stony path, slippery from the dew, that wound through the thick forest. Sometimes we stopped to listen, then went on again.

At last the forest became thinner—I could sense it by a faint, almost imperceptible current of air. We came out on an open space at the top of the mountain. A little way off the path to the left stood a wood-cutters' hut, where a fire was burning.

Gorulya, who led the way, emitted a long, shrill whistle. Another whistle answered him, short and sharp. A few minutes later Gevizi brought Kurtinets to us. They began to discuss something in low tones, while I stood somewhat aside, hearing nothing of what they were saying. Then Kurtinets turned to me.

"It's not wise for you to come any further," he said. "Stay here in the hut till dawn." He turned and called: "Yurkol"

A figure detached itself from a group of wood-cutters and came towards us—a tall young fellow with a jacket thrown over his shoulders. It was the same fellow—Yurko—I had once seen in the upland pasture.

"Let this man stop in the hut till morning," Kurtinets said. "Gevizi'll come for him."

"All right," said the wood-cutter, and moved aside. The moment of parting had come. Gorulya and I found each other in the darkness and embraced silently.

"I wish you all the very best, my son," said Gorulya, stroking my hand. "Well—I must go."

"All the best, Father."

We could say no more. . . .

I remained standing on the path with Yurko; the others went on, vaguely silhouetted against the dark, starry sky.

Yurko rolled a cigarette and lighted it. For a second the match shed its light on his youthful, pock-marked face.

"Have they far to go?" I asked Yurko, still straining my eyes after Gorulya and his companions, although I could no longer see them.

"Nay, the border's quite near," the wood-cutter answered. "But after that—it's far enough! . . . In Moscow it must be getting light now." He lowered his voice: "Have you ever been there?"

"No, I haven't."

"Nor I. . . ." Yurko shrugged his shoulders. "They've put a wall between us, Comrade. . . . A thousand-year-old wall, as the old folks say."

"Yes, they're about right," I said.

"There, you see!" said Yurko. "But all the same they can't keep us apart. Now tell me, how can they keep the people apart? Bind their legs and they reach out with their arms, bind their arms and their hearts meet."

We said nothing more for a moment.

"Come into the hut, Comrade," Yurko suggested. "Maybe you're wanting to rest a bit?"

"No thanks, I can't sleep."

"Well, sit by the fire, then. . . ."

That was how Imre Gevizi found me in the morning—sitting wakeful by the fire.

43

Nineteen thirty-eight—a year that began with rumours and alarms, followed by threats and belligerent clamouring. In the same way that attention had been concentrated on Ethiopia—the first victim of fascist ag-

gression—and somewhat later on the gallant Spanish Republic, in the same way that the world, aghast, had watched Austria transformed overnight into a German province, millions of people in 1938 watched events in Czechoslovakia.

A fascist frenzy was whipped up among the Sudeten Germans by Henlein, the ex-gymnastics instructor, and his party. Henlein had forty seats in the Prague parliament, and he began demanding that the Sudeten areas be annexed to Germany.

Instead of banning the Henlein party and depriving it of its seats, the government under the pretext of "democracy" condoned all that this party was doing. In reality the government feared its home-bred fascists who had Hitler behind them. What would he do next? This was what peaceful people talked about, what they thought about with apprehension whenever they switched on the radio.

"An ultimatum, sir!" the old postman called one day as he handed in my paper through the gate.

"What ultimatum?"

"There it is, sir, you can read it yourself. . . . Hitler has told the government he supports Henlein's demands. . . ."

This terrible piece of news was no surprise: we knew it would come sooner or later. That, however, did not make the blow any less shattering. I unfolded the paper.

"There you are, sir," the postman said, jabbing it with his finger. "On the front page."

It was that hour of the morning when our usually quiet street had its short-lived period of bustle. Railwaymen, plumbers, bricklayers living in the wooded side to the north passed along it on their way to work, and clerks and petty officials in private or public offices cycled

through. Everybody knew Mučička, the postman, and one or two people stopped to ask what was the news.

"An ultimatum," he said gloomily.

More gathered, people alighted from their bicycles, borrowed the paper and read it, looking over each other's shoulders. Some cursed, others were sullenly silent.

"Well, we asked for it and we've got it!" rasped an elderly man in a railway uniform. "And it won't stop at the Sudeten areas. That's just a feeler. Hitler means to swallow Czechoslovakia whole, as he swallowed Austria, damn him!"

Mučička sighed.

"I'm just an ordinary man," he said, "but I can't help thinking—first Spain, then Austria, and now us... When's he going to meet something to break his teeth on?"

"Now is just the time, if you ask me," said the railwayman confidently. "I've seen enough of war, God knows, but if it's a case of putting an end to Hitler, I'm ready!"

"We can't do much alone," said a cyclist with short-cropped hair. "A small country like us—not that our army's worse than a good many."

"But what about our allies? They're big enough!" I put in. "Russia and France!"

"D'you trust our allies, sir?" asked the cyclist.

"Russia—yes!" I answered firmly.

"If we've got Russia, then I'm a fighting man too!" cried the postman. It was said with such hearty fervour that we all smiled. Mučička touched his cap, settled his bag over his shoulder, and marched on to the next house, his cape swinging bravely.

Hitler's demand did not cause the panic which Henlein and the Führer himself expected; on the contrary, the people were indignant and determined to defend their

independence. It was probably this which made the government proclaim mobilization.

Trainloads of troops went to the German frontier, to the Sudetic Mountains and to the border with Hungary, where Hungarian nationalists were openly talking about Hungary's claims to the Sub-Carpathian region, which they insisted was ancient Magyar land.

"Hitler shall not pass! Horthy shall not pass!" the men shouted when the trains stopped at stations, and struck up the Soviet song *If Tomorrow There's War*, which had become popular in Czechoslovakia.

In towns and villages an increasingly persistent rumour spread that Stalin had ordered an army of eight million to be prepared to go to the aid of Czechoslovakia if necessary. This was the people's hope, their desire and deep belief.

It is only now, in our days, that we know of the Soviet Government's proposal at the time, made to President Beneš through Klement Gottwald. It was a confirmation of the Soviet Union's treaty obligations. The Soviet Union was prepared to render military assistance to Czechoslovakia even if France failed to do so, and even if Poland and Rumania refused to permit the passage of Soviet forces. The Soviet Union could help Czechoslovakia on one condition only—if Czechoslovakia rose in her own defence and asked for Soviet assistance.

In those days only a few knew of this proposal. But everybody knew that the reactionaries close to the government were trying to get the treaty with the Soviet Union denounced.

"It will appease Hitler," they insisted, "and Czechoslovakia will be saved."

The people were deeply conscious of the danger looming over them, and all their longings and resolve were concentrated in the demand to the government: "We stand for an indissoluble treaty with the Soviet Union!"

These words sprang to life simultaneously throughout Czechoslovakia. They were written on walls with charcoal and with chalk. They were on the streamers carried by railwaymen and Verkhovina wood-cutters. They resounded in Koryatovich Square in Uzhgorod when delegates from our region, bound for Prague to take part in a demonstration of the united anti-fascist front, gathered there.

Hundreds of people joined the delegates on the square, alarmed, angry, ready for action, eager to defend their country against the fascist robber claims.

In the middle of the square Kurtinets was standing on the roof of a car. His face was stern, his voice broke with emotion.

During all these ominous days he knew neither sleep nor rest; he addressed meetings of Solotvino salt miners, soldiers on the Hungarian frontier, chemical workers at Veliki Bychkov, and people of the mountain villages.

For some his words were the echoing of their own feelings and thoughts, for others they were like a firm foothold in the quaking bog of cowardly defeatist whispers.

"There is only one thing," said Kurtinets, "that can avert the danger looming over us—observance of the treaty with our Soviet ally, and firm measures against those who want to force the country to capitulate. We are told—give Hitler the Sudeten areas and you will have peace in Europe. That's a lie! If we agree to do that, it is not peace that awaits us, but war, and suffering such as people have never yet known. Full confidence in the Soviet Union, with which we have a treaty of mutual assistance! Prison for the fascists, democracy for the people! All rights for the Slovaks and Ukrainians! That is the programme which will save us, the programme which we must make the President and the government accept—now, before it is too late!"

Rain fell on evening Prague. The city was seething and the streets teemed with people. Streaks of light across wet umbrellas, carried overhead by the moving crowds, reflected the flames of thousands of torches. Traffic had stopped. Rows of motor cars stood pressed against the curb, and it seemed that the flow of people would soon push them to the very walls of the houses. All around, wherever you looked, there were umbrellas and torches, umbrellas and torches—sailing in one direction, to the square fronting the presidential palace.

Among those marching were the citizens of Prague, Kladno, Brno and Bratislava; there were Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, German anti-fascists, as well as a big delegation from my native parts.

The beating of the rain on the umbrella tops and the splashing thud of thousands upon thousands of feet mingled, filling the streets with their din. But, from time to time, at what seemed to me intervals of equal length, the din died down, giving way to shouts rolling from one end of the street to the other: "Remain loyal to our friendship with the Soviet Union!... Loyal to our friendship with the Soviet Union..." A brief pause, and then a powerful, peremptory: "Say no to Fascism!"

Halting before the presidential palace, the marchers chose a deputation to hand President Eduard Beneš the demands of the people, adopted at meetings of the anti-fascist front in all parts of the country. I was one of the deputies chosen.

Amidst the ocean of people flooding the square a few narrow passageways were formed, along which the delegates moved to the palace gates.

At the palace gates I found myself side by side with Jaroslav Marek, who was a delegate from Brno. He stood with no umbrella or hat, his wet hair falling in ringlets, and the collar of his rain-coat raised, trying hard to prove

something to a police officer on the other side of the gates' grating.

"We are the people," Marek's peremptory voice sounded. "And Pan President himself should open the gates to us..."

I touched Marek on the shoulder. He turned and recognized me. We exchanged a quick hand-clasp, which expressed everything—our joy at this unexpected meeting, our alarm and our determination.

We had to wait for a long time before the gates opened. After crossing the paved court, we found ourselves in the building of the palace and began mounting the broad staircase, flooded with light.

The sleek, soft-footed officials of the presidential chancellery recoiled to the banisters, as though fearing to be smirched by our dripping garments, and followed us with curious, apprehensive glances.

Dr. Eduard Beneš, the President of the republic, received us in the office.

A frail, short man with smooth hair slicked back from a parting, and with a smile as smooth, entered the spacious room.

His glance passed over our wet faces and drenched clothes from which drops of water fell to the carpeted floor, and a shadow of fear flitted across the President's face. What met his eye was, no doubt, bewildering—importune, alien and inimical to himself, as well as to the stolid palace walls, accustomed to the whisperings of officials and the suave speech of diplomats.

Jaroslav Marek stepped out from the group of deputies and advanced to meet him. He bowed and held out a folder containing the resolutions adopted at meetings.

"This is the will of the people, Pan President," said Marek. "The people want peace and are ready to pay for it with their blood, but not with their liberty. The people,

Pan President, want you and your government to resolutely reject the proposal to capitulate and to act only in the interests of the country's independence."

"We have no other interests," Beneš interrupted sharply and resentfully. But Marek continued as though he had not heard.

"The people protest against Czechoslovakia becoming small change for the governments of certain powers in their game with Hitler. The people understand well that we are a small country, but we can save our independence, and save the peace, if we ask the Soviet Union for assistance. The people expect this. It is for the government to take action. I thank you, Pan President!"

Marek bowed and returned to his place.

Beneš idly turned the pages in the folder without reading them. He was obviously trying to gain time in which to think over his answer. It was just then that a working-woman from Kladno, who stood at my side, stepped forward. The agitated, alarming tones of her voice rent the silence in the room. Gasping for breath, as one who had run a long distance, she spoke hurriedly; it was as though she feared she would be cut short before she could speak out her heart. A heavy woman, strands of wet grey hair showing from under her kerchief, she faced the President.

"Pan President, I have brought up five sons. They are my hope and joy, all I have to live for. I am Marta Butečik from Kladno. Pan President, my boys are good boys. Now all five are soldiers. Yesterday they left for the Sudetenland, for the frontier. Pan President, my sons must not be betrayed."

"They will not be betrayed, Pani," said Beneš, with difficulty trying to conceal his confusion. Drawing a handkerchief which protruded from his top coat-pocket, he rubbed his palms with it, raised it to his eyes and then thrust it back into its place.

"My government and I are the servants of the republic. We shall do our duty."

He said nothing more. The audience was at an end.

With a vague premonition that an irreparable commitment had been made we descended the broad staircase, meeting on our way down a troop of rushing servants, led by an official, and armed with brushes, cloths and electric floor-polishers.

"We shall do our duty...."

They indeed did their duty, those "servants of the republic"! Not by their people and country, but by those who appointed them presidents, premiers and ministers, and who in their frenzied hatred for the Soviets had bred Hitler for a future war against Russia.

The rulers of France, England, Poland and even Czechoslovakia itself were prepared to see the land raped by the fascists rather than have a single Soviet soldier set foot on its soil. The Polish government declared that it would not allow the Red Army to cross its territory, and we know that to the Soviet proposal that mutual obligations to Czechoslovakia be fulfilled the French government replied: "We shall make Hitler yield to persuasion!"

On the 29th of September, 1938, the prime ministers of France and Britain flew to Munich for a meeting with Hitler and Mussolini.

Perhaps some day you, too, may happen to come across an old illustrated magazine like the one lying before me now, with pictures that preserve for history scenes of that meeting of betrayal.

There they sit at the table, in high-backed chairs—the Führer himself with the wild eyes of a maniac, bull-headed Mussolini, the French Prime Minister Daladier, and Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain. Only the principal force, the master of them all, is missing—

the American Money-Bag. It is not there, but what need of its presence? Its will is known, and its menials can take care of the rest. Till the right moment comes it is better for it to remain in the background, at home across the Atlantic, in New York or Washington. What does Czechoslovakia matter if by sacrificing it Hitler can be got to march against the East! True, the corporal is becoming refractory, thinks himself a Napoleon and even talks back at his master—but that does not matter! A war between Hitler and Russia will bleed them both white, and then it will be possible to get a firm grip on both countries.

The deal was made. Against the will of the people, the Sudeten areas were handed over to Germany without a shot being fired.

Cursing, the soldiers abandoned their fortifications, leaving their weapons for the enemy. The towns were like stirred up ant-heaps. People crowded round loudspeakers in the streets, unwilling to believe what they had heard, hoping against hope for a denial. But no denial came. . . . I saw women crying, and men standing silently, stunned by this monstrous betrayal. We all felt that the Sudeten areas were only the beginning, that the worst was yet to come.

The illustrated papers did not print pictures of the soldiers hurling curses at the traitors, or the weeping women; they only gave a picture of the President wiping away his tears—Dr. Eduard Beneš, in a black coat and head uncovered, standing on the broad marble steps, raising his handkerchief to his eyes. Today those tears can no longer deceive anybody. They were not the tears of a president whose country was losing its independence right before his eyes. They were the tears of a traitor, rendering the service of a Judas to his country.

Not only now, however, after the passage of years, but at that time, too, many people were not deceived by

the President's tears. Those were days of helpless rage, dismay and sobering realization of the truth for those who up to the last minute had believed in the honesty of the country's rulers, in their devotion to the republic and the people. Everything was collapsing like a house of cards, with tragic, staggering swiftness. And those who had long ago chosen the road of struggle, now stood on the threshold of grim trials requiring staunch courage and self-sacrifice.

44

"You'd better stop coming here," Kurtinets told me regretfully.

I looked alarmingly and inquiringly at him.

He had grown thin, haggard and silent. He now stood by the window, half facing me and smoking. Anna had gone away with the children about a fortnight ago and the apartment looked strangely desolate and neglected.

"Anna and I have always been glad to have you over," Kurtinets continued, "but now by coming here you endanger your safety."

So that was it.

"I am no coward, Pan Kurtinets."

"But there is no need to be rash. . . . For the friendliness you've always shown," Kurtinets spoke very kindly, "I wish to thank you."

"It is I who must thank you. What, after all, has my friendship meant to you, who have so many friends? . . ."

"There is not a single one I can spare."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "we talk as though we're really parting."

"And so we are, Pan Belinets. . . . A manifesto for disbanding the Party has already been drawn up, and now any day we Communists may be declared outlaws."

I made a movement to rise from my seat but felt that I had lost control of my limbs.

"This is not unexpected to you, Pan Belinets, is it?" Kurtinets asked.

"No, it isn't," I admitted, "events were leading up to it."

And through my mind raced one after another the events which had followed the Munich betrayal. Like stones swept in an avalanche these events were being precipitated to their tragic finale.

The Munich betrayal was barely consummated when the heads of the pro-fascist parties of Sub-Carpathian Rus—Brody, Fencik and the Uniate priest Augustin Voloshin—hastily summoned a rally of their followers which they dignified with the name of a national council, and a petition was sent in all haste to Prague, demanding autonomy for our region.

Autonomy for Sub-Carpathian Rus was in the Czechoslovak Constitution; for nearly twenty years government after government had been promising it only to postpone it on every kind of pretext in the fear that with the Communist Party's influence so strong it might get a majority in the Seim. Now, however, it was not the Communists, but Brody, Fencik and Voloshin, who were demanding autonomy—men who stood in the good books of Berlin.

The question of autonomy was settled within a few days; autonomy came to us like a bolt from the blue.

A representative gathering of Uzhgorod intellectuals was called on this momentous occasion in the grand hall of the "Corona" Hotel.

I went to the gathering at Kurtinets' request, to write an account for the *Karpat'skaya Pravda*.

In one of the lobbies where the guests were assembling I met Father Novak.

"I'm glad to see you here upon this blessed day, my son. I hope now you shall be with us."

"With whom do you mean, Father?" I asked.

"With those who by the grace of God are to build the future of our people."

Tall and erect, his silk soutane rustling ingratiatingly, he led me across the hall, his eyes searching for a secluded place where we could sit down. Finally, spotting a quiet corner, he sank into an arm-chair, motioning me to take one which faced him.

"I have long sought an opportunity for a talk with you, Pan Belinets," Novak said. "I value your erudition and your courage, which, alas, have been misguided."

"I do not find that to be the case, Father," I replied in a restrained tone.

"I regret to hear it." The tiny furrows on the priest's face deepened. "You are a Ukrainian, and in your laudable desire to be of service to your people you must choose the correct course."

"And what may that be?" I inquired warily.

"You must serve the Ukrainian nation."

"That is what I have been doing, Father, as far as it was within my power."

"No, you have not," Novak said irritably, "you have been serving those who have perniciously divided us and turned Ukrainian against Ukrainian. Unity—that is what our sacred blood calls for today; and my pastor's admonition to you is—do not turn a deaf ear to that call, heed it before it is too late. God's patience knows no bounds, but the patience of men comes to an end. . . . You must turn from your past, Pan Belinets. A new Messiah is coming to clear the earth of the Communist scum. Listen to his tread, stern yet salutary."

This was too much for me.

"Do you mean to say that the tread of the German corporal is salutary for the people?"

Novak frowned.

"The times for argument are over, Pan Belinets. For the sake of your near ones who were my devout parishioners, for your own sake..."

Though the sentence was left unfinished, what Novak meant was quite clear to me.

The meeting was opened in the grand hall of the hotel. Several ministers of the newly-fledged cabinet, including the new prime minister Andry Brody, a former singing-teacher, sat in places of honour at small tables. With them sat a few villagers in homespun jackets and rough mountain shoes—Kazarik had brought them to act as representatives of the people. It was said that he had picked them out just before the meeting from among passengers waiting at the railway station. They sat beside the ministers, listening intently to the speech Kazarik made to a hushed audience.

With his hands clasped over his stomach and his eyes cast up to the moulded ceiling, Kazarik spoke grandiloquently and at length, looking as though he would burst into tears of pure joy at any moment.

He said that a great hour had struck in the history of our long-suffering region, that from this moment on an era of rebirth would begin, that the autonomy which had been given was a life-belt thrown to the people, and that the people would immortalize this historic hour in song and story.

He got his applause, but before it had time to die down one of the villagers rose, craned his scraggy neck and apologetically addressed the bowing orator.

"And you be so good as to tell us, sir, what about the land?"

"What land?" Kazarik asked in surprise.

"The gentry's land. Will autonomy divide the land among us as they did in Russia, or will it all stay the same way?... And the debts, sir, will they be taken off us or will it stop the way it is?"

A murmur swept the hall and the ministers looked askance at the villagers.

Kazarik, who had not expected questions since they did not enter into the plan of his speech, was at a loss and tried to hide his embarrassment behind a smile.

"Brothers, I fear you have misunderstood me," he replied. "I speak of the rebirth of the soul of our people."

"The soul!" one of the villagers repeated. "What kind of a soul can there be without land? Eh, sir, I can see it's all just the same as before..." He glanced at the other peasants and picked up his knapsack and staff from the floor. "We've got to be on our way to the station. We've got no time to waste..."

The other villagers followed him. Despite the frantic ringing of the chairman's bell, it was a long time before the whispering died down in the hall.

"The Messiah is coming," Kurtinets said with an ironic smile when I told him in detail the conversation I had with Novak and gave him an account of what had happened in the "Corona" Hotel.

"That priest is more dangerous than Brody, Fencik and even Voloshin himself. Brody and Voloshin are 'caliphs for an hour,' and one fine day they will find themselves generals without an army. As to the Soldier of Christ, his army is invisible. Remember the witness in Gorulya's case?"

"Szabo?"

"Yes, that's the one. Matlakh throws him out, Pan Novak picks him up. And how many more much smarter and craftier fellows he's got than that Szabo chap... There is no denying it, in our struggle we have often underestimated the power of the Vatican... As to Brody and Voloshin, we'll call them in the article 'caliphs for an hour,' and I don't think we shall be far wrong."

Time soon showed that Kurtinets was absolutely right.

Brody now took no trouble to conceal his devotion to Horthy, whose agent he was, and his manipulations soon brought the Magyarons¹ in Sub-Carpathian Rus out into the open. They marched arrogantly about the streets in bellicose groups, tricolour rosettes with a portrait of Horthy on their lapels, bawling songs of victory. The very sight of them was nauseating. The murky Nazi wave splashed into the light of day: the devil knows from what thieves' dens all these speculators, petty criminals and pimps had crawled out. It was hideous to think what would happen if that scum got power.

Brody himself announced that Ugrian Ruthenia (he had revived the former Austro-Hungarian name), must come under Horthy.

The government, which had had enough of Brody's importunity, summoned him to Prague and placed him under arrest. This was much to the liking of the Nazi Foreign Ministry. Berlin considered that this premier of a fortnight was taking altogether too much upon himself; the Führer had his own plans for Sub-Carpathian Rus. Another aspirant for the role of premier emerged. He was a man with a foxy face and hard eyes peering through spectacles—Augustin Voloshin, bourgeois nationalist, Uniate priest and German agent.

I was sitting in Kurtinets' home and could not believe that this man, so badly needed by the people, so much part and parcel of the people's struggle, stood in danger of being an outlaw any day now.

"Good heavens," I said aloud, "it's no more than twenty-three days since the Munich betrayal."

"Twenty-three days," Kurtinets repeated, "and it seems years to me."

He passed his hand over his face, as though wishing to erase the traces of sleepless nights and of the strain

¹ Supporters of Horthy's Hungary in Czechoslovakia.—*Ed.*

of the unequal combat, the brunt of which was borne by him and his Party comrades, traces of the painful thoughts of one who foresees danger ahead and yet is powerless to avert it.

"Is it really the end?" I wanted to know.

"The end? No, Pan Belinets, it's only the beginning," Kurtinets said, his voice growing tense, "the beginning of a fierce, and perhaps a long struggle."

He turned to the window and flung it wide open as though he felt suffocated and crowded in the room.

Through the window we saw the warm, clear October day drawing to a close. The distant wooded mountain-sides, the vineyards, and orchards in the city below, bore a touch of the russet tints of autumn. A prodigious nut-tree, growing by the house, was shedding its brown, withered leaves; and a faint sweetish odour of mouldiness invaded the room. Roses were still blooming, and the flaming cannas looked like torches set into the ground. Women were idly gossiping by the open windows, boys chased hoops, and little girls busied themselves on door-steps with their toy furniture, and with ministering, feeding, punishing and rocking to sleep their fretful dolls.

I left Kurtinets with the hope that it was not our last meeting, that we would soon see each other again and perhaps hear each other say with relief: "Well, you see things have turned out not half so bad as we expected."

But three days later the ban on the Communist Party was announced over the wireless.

My thoughts at once turned to Kurtinets. I made my way hurriedly to the street where he lived, avoiding the gaze of passers-by, so as not to betray my consternation and alarm. Uzhgorod, its houses and people, now seemed cold and unfriendly to me.

When at last I came to Kurtinets' street, I slowed down my step and, reaching the corner, stopped. The house was cordoned off, the door had been torn from its

hinges and was lying on the porch, and the autumn wind was blowing the curtains out through the open windows.

"What's happened here?" I asked a woman standing in a group of curious onlookers.

"They're looking for Communists," she whispered.

"Have they found any?"

"No, there was nobody there. . . ."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

In addition to "our own" ministers and "our own" storm-troops we were now given "our own" concentration camps. Arrests and round-ups continued day and night.

While the farce of "independence" was being played, in Vienna Hitler's minister Ribbentrop and the Hungarian minister Csäky were haggling: in exchange for Hungary's alliance with Germany in the future war against the Soviet Union Hitler offered Horthy part of Sub-Carpathian Rus, leaving the other part for the present under Voloshin.

As soon as the haggling became known, the region grew wary and stormy.

Uzhgorod was astir with meetings, some spontaneous, others organized by various parties.

On the square in front of the theatre, I happened to witness one of the many meetings held at the time: a table was brought out from a near-by restaurant; without removing the cloth, a speaker got up on it and began addressing crowds of city folk returning from their day's employment, as well as groups of sojourning villagers.

The speaker had a huge tricolour cockade stuck in the lapel of his rain-coat. He waved his arms and was holding forth on justice and all the "good" that we were going to enjoy under St. Stephen's crown.

I recognized the speaker as Leshchetsky. He was being shouted down but he paid little heed to it. Leshchetsky, the agrarian of yesterday, knew full well that now he

stood to gain nothing by supporting either autonomy or Czech orientation. The one was a short-lived utopia, the other a hopelessly lost case. Since he believed in siding with "the strong"—and at the moment Horthy, the Magyar "knight-errant," represented "the strong"—Leshchetsky cast in his lot with Horthy, not because of any convictions he had on the score, but because he saw the need of currying favour with the new masters.

"The people want Hungarian rule," Leshchetsky kept shouting, and adjusted the cockade in his lapel.

"You lie," a young stentorian voice cut in.

The man who spoke was elbowing his way through the crowd and trying to get to the speaker. To clear the road for him I held back the people pressing behind me. He walked straight ahead, his body slightly inclined and chest thrust forward. When he reached me and I saw his flaming pock-marked face, in an instant I recalled the wood-cutters' hut near the Uzhok Pass.

"Yurko!"

He turned to look at me, but, either failing to recognize me or too intent on his purpose, he made no answer. Taking a light jump, which seemed to have cost him no effort, in a flash he was on the table beside Leshchetsky and pushed the latter aside with his hand in which he clutched his hat; stuck in the band of the hat was the fir twig worn by all wood-cutters.

"You lie," he repeated. "Let me tell you what the people want and what they don't want. The people neither want the gentry's autonomy nor the Magyar overlords. We're fed up with the gentry and the overlords. We do not want the sacred crown of St. Stephen, though it drew such fine words from the Pan here. The backs of the Magyar people themselves are bent and their bones crushed under the weight of that crown.

"We're sick and tired of foreign rule, we are," he shouted, striking a high note. "We've got our own big

nation; we long to be united to it, to the people of Soviet Ukraine, to Soviet Russia. That's what the people want and will want until they get it."

The crowd stirred.

"Right-o, lad!"

"He's a Communist! Down with him!" howled one of the "black shirts" of Fencik's Nationalist party, standing a short distance away from me.

"He's a Communist! Down with him!" repeated other voices and a number of toughs, including the "black shirt" who had shouted first, pushed to the table.

For a moment I was afraid of what might happen to Yurko; but only for a moment, as I soon saw people, in town and village clothes, moving from various directions to intercept the "black shirt" and his supporters. I hurried to do the same, edging my way through the crowd.

"Join hands," shouted a stockily-built man in a cap which had slipped to the back of his head.

To reach him I flung out my right arm over someone's head and stretched out my left hand to clasp that of an elderly peasant near by. We formed a chain round the table, our faces turned to the crowd.

The "black shirt" and his confederates cooled down. They stopped a short distance from the chain and stood glaring at us.

"Go on speaking, lad, don't you be afraid," a number of voices shouted to Yurko.

"I'm not afraid," was his reply. "Did you hear what I said, Pan? I am in my own country. I am not going to sell it to anyone. If they take our land by force, they'll get it in the neck, you may take the people's word for it!"

Yurko jumped from the table. Leshchetsky sent after him something like a threat or a curse that was lost in the general uproar.

High up in the Carpathians, beneath the very sky, a wooden dam keeps in check the rushing waters of the Tereblya. These waters once flooded the mountain valleys around, and, as a result, the deep Lake Sinevir was formed. Tall, sombre spruces rim the lake; it seems as though, one early morning, catching sight of the body of water that had so unexpectedly sprung up, a whole mass of them hurried down the mountain-sides, halting in sudden awe at the very edge of the lake; and now, charmed to the spot, with curiosity and wonder, they look down over each other's shoulders into the deep water below.

From spring until autumn the northern shore of the lake is the scene of great activity; it is from here that the rafts start out on their journey down the Tereblya.

Twice a week, at dawn, the huge sluices are opened and the water of the lake, roaring and frothing, dashes down to the river from a height of sixty-five feet. Over the dam a pillar of spattering water is precipitated into the air. If the day happens to be sunny, a tremulous rainbow casts its coloured bridge across the sky from shore to shore. In a few hours the Tereblya turns from a shallow, rippling stream into a fast-flowing torrent, giving no sign of former boulders or shoals.

The raftsmen get busy. Tall, muscular men of few words, shod in calked boots to prevent slipping on the wet logs, they drive their rafts midway down the lake, the current gradually drawing them to the middle sluice. For a fraction of a second the raft seems suspended in the air over the waterfall. The raftsmen squat, their long oars held in readiness. Another instant—and the raft, outweighed by its keel, sweeps down the wall of water at break-neck speed. The river meets the raftsmen with a rebound of sprays. In a roaring tumult the rolls of water

come lashing against the raft and the drivers, trying hard by sheer force and blinding impact to cast them ashore on the rocks. But the raftsmen stand as firm as though rooted to the spot. In the nick of time they fling forward their oars. A few well-timed movements and the raft is completely under their control, gliding smoothly down the current and disappearing in the bend of the river. But the raftsmen's course is by no means safe as yet. All along the many miles of his way, the river seems to be waiting for him to relax his vigilance, so that it may catch him unawares in places where the current is swiftest, where there are rocks or shoals, or in narrow passages under the bridges, and wreck his raft.

I know no spot in the Carpathians that can compare with the wild, romantic beauty of the scenery around Lake Sinevir. Nor do I know more forthright, honest and stout-hearted fellows than the raftsmen of the Tereblya. It was among them that Olexa Kurtinets started out on an independent life. And raftsmen from Sinevir, Kolochava and Dragov often say with no little pride: "He's from our ranks."

I was well familiar with every nook and corner of this region, deep in the Carpathians, and whenever my job took me there I went with a glad heart, except for one occasion—late October, nineteen thirty-eight. Those were hard and uncertain times and I feared to wander too far from home. It was as though I had a forewarning of evil.

Our manager, however, was an extremely punctilious person.

"I don't care what happens, gentlemen," he was fond of saying, "whether it be another deluge or the world gone to the dogs, but a job's a job and it's got to be done."

I must say that where work was concerned I myself was not devoid of the same sort of punctiliousness. Therefore I could not refuse to go. Besides it would have hurt my self-pride to do so.

Thus it was with a feeling of uneasiness and some foreboding that Ruzhana and I took leave of each other, though we tried hard not to show it—I, by appearing as casual as possible, Ruzhana, by assiduously concentrating on packing my things. Only on the threshold, as I was leaving, Ruzhana suddenly stopped and brushing her fingers against my jacket-sleeve said softly: "You won't be gone long, Ivanko?..."

"Certainly not," I replied with a smile. "Don't you fret, Ruzhana, do you hear me? You needn't worry about anything happening to me"

"Ah, you're also thinking something might happen to you?"

"No, I'm not thinking of that, my dear! I'll be away only five days, and what is five days after all?"

"Oh Lord!" Ruzhana exclaimed sadly and shook her head as though trying to banish her gloomy thoughts.

In a troubled state of mind I left home and a day later was already in the mountains.

Though it was late October, in the hills, as in the lowlands, there was no sign of the coming winter. Sunny days alternated with rainy days, the weather being so mild that the raftsmen had resumed the floating of timber along the Tereblya, though the season was long over.

"The year's all crooked," said the rangers who accompanied me.

I began my inspection far in the hills, where there was only a handful of very highly situated hamlets. There were no roads for wheeled vehicles; only narrow paths where none but our small-sized Hutsul horses could feel at home.

The mountaineers in these distant parts were virtually shut off from the rest of the world; most of them never even descended to the valleys below. Their heavy toil and burden of cares left them little strength and no leisure—

not even time for curiosity; at any rate they were not communicative with strangers. Taciturn, suspicious and proud, they betrayed little interest in the outside world. When questions were put to them they answered readily; but they rarely ventured to inquire about anything themselves.

Now, however, they seemed to have cast off their old reserve. Whoever we happened to meet on the road—be it an old man on his way to a neighbour's, or a lad carrying a bundle of fire-wood from a near-by lumber-camp—moved aside to let us pass, and upon recognizing a stranger in me, asked: "Please, sir, tell us what news you bring from over there?"

"Over there" was no longer a place of little concern to these mountaineers.

They listened very attentively to my reply, eager not to miss a word, so that what I told them could be passed on to others.

"You don't happen to be acquainted with the good man Olexa Kurtinets, sir?" they invariably inquired next. "He's from our parts, used to be a raftsman on the Tereblya. They say he and his friends have been shut up in jail, but nobody here dares believe it. We voted for him at the last election. Maybe, sir, you've heard what Olexa Kurtinets' opinion is of the things that are going on now?"

I had noticed that whenever such questions were asked, one of the forest rangers, Duketa by name, a hawk-nosed, retiring sort of person, would always prick up his ears. I answered that I did not know Olexa Kurtinets nor anything that might have happened to him. However, as regards the events that were taking place, I spoke of them as I thought Olexa himself would have done. And by the expression on the faces of my listeners, I could guess what was going on in their hearts. Far from understanding politics, yet by the instinct possessed by the common

man, they sensed the impending danger and felt what course must be taken to avert it.

"Thanks, sir, for telling us the truth," they said in farewell.

We had been on the road for a few days and were already making our way back to Lake Sinevir when a spell of stormy weather overtook us. A northern gale was blowing, and a wet snow came sweeping down from low shaggy clouds. A cold, dank slush filled the woods and mountains. The paths were slippery and it was with difficulty that we reached the dam and put up for the night at the sluice-keeper's, hoping for better weather in the morning. But the blizzard did not abate the following day. The road leading from the dam had so swelled with mud that one of the rangers, undertaking a journey across to the village of Sinevir, was compelled to turn back before he had even gone two miles.

We were not the only ones stranded by the lake. On its northern shore the raftsmen were waiting in their tents for the blizzard to subside, so that they could return to their villages. Their rafts were laid up, as it was against regulations to float them in stormy weather.

"How long do you think this can last?" unable to hide my vexation, I asked the sluice-keeper who had taken us in.

"This is as the Lord wills it, sir," he answered, unruffled. "It may, indeed, last for quite a while. The chances for any travelling back and forth are very slim, indeed. And by this time," he looked through the window, against which wet fluffy snow-flakes were beating like swarms of butterflies, "the road bridges have been swept away."

In a leisurely way that irritated me, he began drawing on his store of stormy weather tales. As I listened I couldn't help feeling that I was caught in a trap; and I saw no way of getting out of it.

The first two days I felt terribly restless and annoyed. I had even set my mind on starting out on foot. But soon, realizing that I could not get very far and that my irascibility and bad temper would lead me nowhere, I resigned myself to my lot with the sole comfort that there were many others in a similar plight.

On one of these weary days of waiting by the shore of Lake Sinevir, when our spirits were at their lowest, we received tidings of the fresh misfortune that had befallen our land.

The innkeeper from Kolochava, a sharp-witted, enterprising fellow, realizing that our party, stranded by the lake, must have run out of food, managed by sheer miracle to reach us with two of his men, carrying a supply of the inn's provisions.

Removing the loads from their backs, the men, weary and drenched to the skin, sank to the floor, fighting for breath like fish cast ashore.

The first to catch his breath was the innkeeper. Panting, he rose from the floor and began getting flasks of spirits, bread and bacon out of his mud-spattered sacks.

Anticipating a good day's trade, the innkeeper brightened and let loose his glib tongue.

"Judge for yourself, sir," he was addressing me, "could I let you poor people starve out here? Certainly not. The innkeeper at Sinevir never gave a thought to helping you out, though it's much nearer from him to get to the lake than it was for me from Kolochava. Don't you get asking me about the road. There is no road. The bridges have been swept away. Yet I risked it. But, sir, I've almost forgotten to tell you. . . . There's news down below. Think of it, Uzhgorod, Mukachevo and Beregovo have passed over to Hungary. . . ."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the effect they had on me so terrified him that he drew back to the wall.

"What? What did you say?" Not hearing my own voice I took a step towards the innkeeper, never imagining that I could hate a man so heartily merely because I could not doubt the truth of his words.

"Sir," the innkeeper rattled on, "God is witness that I speak the truth. . . . They've come to an agreement on November 2 in Vienna about giving Pan Horthy these towns. . . . Who've come to an agreement, you ask? Why, Ribbentrop and Ciano! Yes, sir, it's a few days already since our autonomous government has moved to Chust; they're not letting anybody pass to Beregovo or Uzhgorod now across the border."

Dumbfounded I stood in the middle of the hut and no longer heard what the others were saying. Nor did I notice that the forest ranger called Duketa had disappeared. I remained in a dazed state for a long time. Meanwhile, the rest of the raftsmen, as I learned later, warned by Duketa, succeeded in making their way from the northern shore of the lake to the sluice-keeper's hut. It was the din of their voices that brought me out of my stupor.

The hut was empty. Through the open door I caught sight of the crowd of raftsmen outside. The wet snow fell on their jackets and narrow-rimmed hats and was dripping down. The men looked excited and seemed to be arguing over something with the sluice-keeper.

Only after I stepped out of the hut could I make out what a lean-looking raftsman, who resembled Fyodor Skripka, was shouting. In a cape flung across his shoulders, with legs wide apart, he stood facing the sluice-keeper.

"We're going down the river! Open the sluices, we tell you."

"Have you lost your senses, my good folk!" the sluice-keeper cried, gesticulating. "Whoever thought of rafting in weather like this!"

"You heard what the Pesigolovets men are about there, down below, you did, didn't you?" the raftsmen persisted. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Open the sluices." The men were in an uproar.

"My good folk," the sluice-keeper pleaded, "I cannot do it, it's a sin, your own widows and orphans will curse me for it."

"Don't you worry about that!"

"Hey, you, get out of the way," Duketa, who happened to be among the raftsmen, yelled at the innkeeper. The latter had been trying his best to divert the raftsmen from their purpose.

"Are you going to open the sluices?"

"No," replied the sluice-keeper, then suddenly catching sight of me, he brightened up. "I am not master here. Look, there is Pan Engineer from the Head Office. Whatever he says I'll do." Having uttered these words he stared hopefully at me with his bleary eyes.

His gaze, however, meant nothing to me; I saw only the dour, hostile glances of the raftsmen. In them I read what was in my own heart—a deep sense of injury and resentment against the monstrous rape of our long-suffering land, and mingled with it a gnawing anxiety about home and near ones. It was hard to say which feeling was the stronger. The hurt the men felt was in my heart too, and like they I was eager for action. At the same time I fully realized the responsibility that the sluice-keeper had so suddenly thrust upon my shoulders, and what risk it was to raft down the Tereblya in stormy weather.

Yet I said to the sluice-keeper: "Open the sluices, the men must go home and I'll come along with them."

"Pan!" the sluice-keeper cried, then suddenly casting down his eyes and heaving a sigh, added: "Eh, Pan, do you think I don't understand?" and straddling through the mud, he went to the dam.



An hour and a half later, when the raftsmen reckoned out that the water had reached the required level along the entire floating distance, the rafts, observing a fifteen minutes' safety interval, set out one after another down the Tereblya. From a distance they may well have looked like giant birds crushed to the water's surface by the snow, and with all their might straining to push through the blizzard to the sun which seemed to be just around the river bend—only to find there the same white haze of snow, the rising surge and sombre, inaccessible shores.

The rafts rocked. The planks, secured tight to the cross-bar but loosely compacted to the tail-end of the raft, creaked violently, and it seemed that any minute now the dowels would break, the planks tear loose from the yoke—and that would be the end.

But the raftsmen, their clothes dripping wet, stood armed with axes and boat-hooks, ready to meet any exigency. Rage and indignation made them insensible to the cold. Many had even refused to take a drop of brandy before starting out.

"We're hot and bitter enough inside without it," they said and took up the oars.

I happened to be on the raft following the head one. It was driven by Tsar and his four sons, some of the ablest raftsmen on the Tereblya. Their hats pushed low over their foreheads to keep the snow out of their eyes, they kept running with their oars from one side of the raft to the other, the beads of perspiration mingling with the wet snow on the several days' stubble that covered their faces.

Old Ivan Tsar was getting on for seventy, yet he was as strong and skilful a raftsman as the younger men. I was not in a frame of mind for admiring prowess or skill; I had not yet recovered from the raft's leap down into the river from the lake, when a wave had almost knocked me off my feet. Drenched to the skin and numb with cold, I

clutched at a cross-bar, trying to evade the chilling, prickly sprays. And yet I caught myself involuntarily admiring the old man's movements, precise, sure and quick as lightning. At times it seemed to me that it cost him little effort to guide the raft; but his quivering fingers, red from cold, and his panting breath told me what strength of muscle and grit the raftsmen's job required.

"Dad, take a smoke, we'll manage here ourselves," Ivan Tsar's solicitous sons would cry out to their father in places where the river ran smooth.

The old man, smoking a short-stemmed pipe, approached me.

"We've only got to get to Dragovo, sir. From there we can make our way to Chust on foot. . . . Eh, too bad we got wind of it so late. I bet they're fighting a pitched battle there by now."

"You think so?"

"Good God, sir, can you doubt it!" the old man exclaimed as he caught the note of uncertainty in my voice. He looked at me disapprovingly. "How could it be otherwise? Do you think the people do not hold dear their native land?"

"The people do," I replied, "but how about Pan Premier Voloshin?"

The old man knit his brows.

"He's not a Turk, Pan! Our soil was a mother to him. . . . Well, and if he did bow to that devil Hitler, that makes no odds now, I tell you." With a sidelong glance at his sons and lowering his voice, he added: "Hands are even raised against God when he deceives. . . . And now how can one not raise one's hand. . . . Why, only a downright villain won't stand up for his own mother."

I had no illusions in regard to either Voloshin or what went by the name of "government" in ravaged Czechoslovakia. However, I did not wish to contradict the old man, for I myself hoped against hope for a miracle.

"Has not our land already had more than its share of suffering and humiliation?" I thought. "When will it all end? When?"

But no miracle happened, though the Tereblya raftsmen were not the only ones whose blood was up.

The rafts glided past coastal villages hidden in the haze of the blizzard. Years later, the people of these villages told me how they could not believe their own eyes when they saw us on the river, braving the storm. To the old folks it seemed then that they had beheld Dovbuś,¹ the gallant legendary champion, and his staunch men rise from the bowels of the mountains to take up cudgels against the foe.

What they also told me was that the alarmed notary at Kolochava had telephoned to one of Voloshin's officials at Chust and kept shouting: "There is something brewing, Pan. . . . A thousand men, no less. . . . The blizzard? The blizzard hasn't stopped them, they're coming right through it."

So it was to the notary at Kolochava that we were indebted for the reception we got at Dragovo.

Evening was drawing, when the rafts, one after another, drifted into Dragovo Creek. In the gathering dusk the shore seemed deserted. The raftsmen, groping in the dark, were bringing their rafts ashore; only the splashing of the water and the creaking of boards as they rubbed against each other were audible. Suddenly a cry came from the shore:

"Men on the rafts, lay down arms."

It came so unexpected that it stunned the raftsmen. I peered into the darkness but could discern nothing except a faint, shimmering shore-line.

"You're told to lay down arms," the order rang out again.

¹ Leader of 18th century serf uprisings in the Carpathians and hero of many songs and legends.—*Tr.*

"We have no arms," the answer came from the head raft. "But we're coming to get some."

"Brothers," came a second voice from the shore. By the tone I concluded that it belonged either to a priest or a schoolmaster. "Brothers, there is no fighting on our land, there is peace."

"What about Uzhgorod?" I cried out. "And Mukachevo?"

"Not one drop of blood was shed there," came the reply. "By the will of the Almighty, these cities have passed from us."

"And pray, who is the Almighty you worship?" a fearless voice, full of rancour, spoke from the raft next to ours. "Is it the Lord or is it someone else? Why don't you answer? Let's get to him, boys, and make him tell us."

The men on the rafts stirred. The clanging of the axes and boat-hooks they carried cut through the darkness. Calling to one another, they jumped from raft to raft.

Having no weapon, I put the weight of my body against a cross-bar which the raftsmen used as a rack for their jackets and bags, and tearing it out of place, hurried after Tsar and his sons to the head of the raft.

That very moment two machine-gun volleys were fired from opposite sides of the shore as a warning to us. We drew back, some of us slipping and falling into the water.

"Shed no blood, brothers," we heard the same voice from the shore. "Leave what arms you have on the rafts and go home in peace."

"Judases!" shouted old Ivan Tsar, speaking for the first time. "There is no home and no peace for us while the likes of you walk the earth." And tearing his hat off his head he tossed it to his feet.

...Glum and sullen, one after another, we descended from the rafts on to the shore. Around us we saw vague

outlines of the figures of armed Voloshinites. I walked past them, biting my lips till the blood came, with the despair of a man betrayed, yet powerless to do anything about it.

46

The prickles of barbed-wire entanglements cut into the throbbing body of our land. Wound in several rows around posts, the wire stretched from south-east to north-west, across roadways and plough-lands, with cold cruelty cutting off the uplands from the plains below—and marking the new boundary-line.

A fortnight ago, near Beregovo, I first came near enough at night to touch the wire. There was a clicking sound, a shout, and bullets whizzed overhead just above my hiding-place. Following the shots, a rocket reluctantly soared up into the sky, scattering a pale light over the land.

I lay prone, more dead than alive, with my face dug in the wet grass, by some building debris, where I managed to escape when I heard the frontier guard shout. After what seemed an eternity, the flare of the rocket died out. I leapt to my feet and made off, cursing the bad luck I had in my first attempt to cross the border.

For a whole fortnight I roamed down the length of the boundary, moving in the direction of Uzhgorod. By day, not to draw the notice of the frontier guards, I hid in the villages, and by night I made one attempt after another to cross the border; but with no success. There were many like me. On either side of the boundary-line were dozens and perhaps hundreds of stragglers, cut off from their homes. By day, like myself, they kept in concealment. At night, rockets blazed in the sky, shots were fired here and there by the barbed-wire entanglements; and many, who but a minute ago dreamed of being reunited with their families, now found here eternal peace.

I went about unshaven, my clothes were grimy and frayed. It was monstrously absurd to keep me from my home, my wife and son, of whom I now could not think without grave misgivings. Like a wounded bird which summons all its strength to return to its nest, I yearned to get to my home, across the border. My mind was growing dull, my body insensible to discomforts, but my instinct drove me on, and I strove stubbornly to reach my loved ones. I knew only one enemy—the barbed-wire entanglement. My hatred for it was so intense that at times I longed to get at the entanglement even in broad daylight and rend it asunder with my bare hands. It was by the greatest effort of will that I refrained from doing anything so rash.

I had lost track of the number of attempts I made to cross the border in my wanderings towards the north-west. It was indeed a miracle, if there be such a thing as miracles, that I had so far escaped being shot down by Hungarian or Voloshin frontier guards.

One day, at the break of dawn, which held out the promise of fine weather, I found myself on the very outskirts of Uzhgorod. The first few minutes I looked about very much perplexed, not knowing how I had got there. The thought that I might have somehow, in the dead of night, without knowing it myself, crossed the border at a breach in the barbed wire, and had mistaken the city environs for a village, flashed across my mind. Good God, was I dreaming or seeing a mirage, I wondered. But my surroundings were real enough. The sun had not yet risen but the city was clearly visible. The streets were empty. On a lonely hill, blotting out from view the descent to the flat stretch below, towered the huge ancient castle of Uzhgorod. At that hour of the morning, it looked like a colossal hen, and the white houses of the town like fledglings nestling around it, with the orchards spreading behind them. No, it was not a dream. I stood near the

north end of Uzhgorod, some ten minutes' distance from my own home. I saw the familiar tiled roof, wet with hoar-frost, and the smoke curling from the chimney.

I felt hot and my forehead was moist.

"Ruzhana ... Ilko," I cried under my breath, and jumped over a fence that ran around a small house. Beside myself with joy I rushed ahead. However, after running only a few yards, I felt overpowered by exhaustion. To prevent from dropping to the ground I caught at the branches of an old, stubby apple-tree.

I gasped for breath. My temples were beating so hard that I thought the blood-vessels would burst. I kept on my feet, pressing the weight of my body against the branches, my eyes glued to the white smoke over the roof-top of my house. I could see neither the windows nor the door; only the roof and the chimney with the smoke lazily curling out of it.

"What are you doing here?" I heard an alarmed whisper behind me. I did not turn.

"There is my house. . . . I'm going home."

"You cannot go there," came the same whispering voice. "Look, there is the border."

And, indeed, some twenty yards ahead of me, cutting across the garden, ran the hated barbed-wire entanglement.

"No, no," I stuttered, "that's impossible. . . . The house I live in is over there. . . . Look, there, to the right of the hill, you can see the roof. . . ."

I turned around to face the man who stood behind me. It was Mučička, the postman.

"Pan Engineer!" he exclaimed in amazement. "Why, I wouldn't have recognized you. What's happened? What brought you here? Why aren't you in Uzhgorod?"

After sympathetically listening to me as I told my story, he was anxious for me to come home with him.

"Let's get away. It won't do for the guards to see you

here. It's very strict on the border." And Mučička laughed a soundless laugh. "The 'border' indeed! Your home is across the border, and so's my job, and my apple-trees, too, see them over there? I planted them myself ten years ago, and now they belong to a 'foreign country.'"

Mučička laughed again—a mirthless laugh.

For about a week I stopped with Mučička, all the while nursing the hope that I may at last succeed in crossing the border. Through Mučička I tried to strike up a friendship with the frontier guards, or to find a man who could help me out. However, all my attempts, and all of the post-man's efforts, proved of no avail.

Here, too, rockets flared at night and shots were fired. A hunt would start. Those who were caught were dragged to a little house where the frontier guards were quartered, some remonstrating, imploring, expostulating, others walking in silence. In the day-time I would sit for hours looking out of Mučička's attic window at the roof of my own house, with a vision of Ruzhana and my son before me. It was a torment to think that I was so near them, yet powerless to rejoin them.

Finally, at the end of my tether, I took the decision to go to Chust. There I planned to solicit for an official permit to cross the border.

47

Back in my student days, I once happened to see the performance of a touring operetta company in a little town near Brno.

The smooth-tongued impresario, with pomaded side-whiskers, resorted to the usual publicity tricks to attract spectators. He spoke of the "roaring success" the company, which would now favour them with a performance, had had in Vienna, Prague, Paris and other European capitals.

"The great Offenbach himself kissed the hand of our prima donna," the impresario shouted. "Our patriotic sentiments alone have prompted us, on our way to Budapest, to give a number of performances in this exquisite little town of our republic. We promise you first-rate entertainment, heart-rending drama and rollicking laughs galore!"

There was something ludicrous and revolting in the glib lies the impresario told to draw the public, as well as in the flesh-coloured hose, representing a bald scalp, worn by the actor who played the proverbial old musical baron, and who in real life possessed a fine shock of hair. It was, indeed, pathetic and horrifying to see what effort was exerted to present a disgusting sham as art, when it never was and never could be art.

I recalled this when I found myself in Chust, the newly-fledged capital of Voloshin's "Carpathian Ukraine."

This erstwhile quiet, small town, with its dust-laden streets, suddenly turned administrative centre, was now sorely over-populated. It resembled a hustling fair with none of its gaiety. The impression was that the city houses, like old, overstuffed sacks of grain, had ripped open to let out a human deluge, which was inundating the streets and side-streets, the public squares, restaurants and cafés.

Apart from the native population, among the people who filled the city were the new government officials, refugees from the towns ceded to Horthy, students of the so-called "Trade Academy," armed to the teeth, their not too strong heads turned by Voloshin's smooth propaganda, and hard-boiled immigrants long past the flush of youth. Each day saw more and more of the latter flock to the city. They came here from all corners of Europe and the New World—heartened one-time Hetman and Petlyura followers and OUN¹ members. They lounged about in cafés or were to be seen at meetings, held at all

¹ OUN—Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.—*Ed.*

hours of the day, at which Voloshin's ministers shouted themselves hoarse, promising to arm all Ukrainians who would give their allegiance to Voloshin, as well as to set up an invincible army of the "Carpathian Sech."

The "Academy boys" and the men well past their youth yelled "Glory!" and vowed to wipe out all Communists.

All this would have looked very much like the cheap musical comedy show I had seen, were not the people compelled to pay a much higher price than a few hellers for the poor acting.

I was taken in by Chonka's parents who resided permanently in Chust. Their small house was crammed with tenants; and I was given a place to sleep in their furniture shop on a joiner's bench, which happily was still unoccupied.

"First of all," said Chonka's father, a tall, bony man with a pencil-stub behind his ear, after he had bemoaned my many mishaps, "first of all you need a change of clothes. I would have taken you for a tramp had I met you in the street. Well, and when you look decent enough we'll think of what can be done. . . . You've met Father Novak before, haven't you?"

"I have," I forced myself to reply, recalling my last meeting with the priest. "Is he in Chust?"

"Why, of course!" answered old Chonka. "Where else would you expect him to be. True, he's not on the cabinet, but. . . ." Here he paused and lowering his voice added: "Evil tongues say that the ministers stand in awe of him."

The old man took me to wash, and bringing me a suit and a coat, belonging to one of his sons, was delighted to see how well the clothes fitted me.

The owner of "Chust Furniture Firm" (which really was nothing but a shop) and his stout wife, who suffered from shortness of breath, had the reputation of being "eccentric." What had made them seem so in the eyes of

Chust's respectable society was the fact that the Chonkas were always eager to help some lame duck, giving freely of their time, energy and even funds, though they were often in financial straits themselves, and were not particularly successful in managing their own affairs. There were those who paid them with ingratitude, but they took it all in good grace. What, however, cut them to the quick was when they were called "impractical." How could he, the sole owner of a "furniture firm," be called "impractical." The "firm" was old Chonka's weakness, and it was to keep the firm going that he had for once let his self-interest get the better of his kindness and had his son Vasil marry for money. . . . That, by the way, was something that weighed heavily on the old couple's conscience.

Chonka had no love for the political parties then in existence.

"God created man in his own image," he said once, when the conversation turned to politics, "that means that man's got to live like God. If there were a party that fought for that kind of life for the people, I would join it myself."

"That is exactly what the Communist Party is fighting for," I said.

"I'll have nothing to do with the Communists," replied Chonka, "they're against my firm."

While the old folks were getting some refreshment for me and I was tidying myself up I thought of Novak. He was the only person whose help I could ask and my dislike for him was not going to stop me.

* * *

A hefty, ruddy, goose-stepping fellow carrying a carbine led me down the glass-panelled gallery of a one-storey house. Stopping in front of a massive door, he said: "Go in!"

After a moment's pause I pressed the carved door-handle and was surprised how easily and noiselessly the door gave way. I found myself in a rather spacious, light room, furnished with but a soldier's cot, a desk, several chairs and a hard high-backed arm-chair. In it, at the desk, sat Novak.

It was on the third day after my arrival in Chust that I had gone to see him.

Novak was writing. But, upon hearing my footsteps, he put aside his pen, and lifting his spectacles on to his forehead, rose.

"It was a pleasant surprise for me, my son, to hear that you were in Chust," Novak said as he held out his hand to be kissed. Evidently not wishing to know the real reason for my arrival in the city, he added: "But what is there to be surprised about? All has been done, my son, that out of chaos and error order may once more be established."

"Possibly, Father," I replied. "But was it necessary to dismember our land to establish the new order you speak of?"

"It was a sacrifice," Novak sighed. "A sacrifice for which we shall reap reward in the future, in the very near future."

"I would take what you say for a mere assurance of faith," I said, growing wary, "but your having added 'in the very near future' gives a definite connotation to your words. You know then what that reward will be."

"That is no longer a secret," Novak replied. "We have been promised the Ukraine, the whole of the Ukraine."

"Which means war?" The words were out of my mouth before I knew it.

"Well, what of it, if it is God's will?" Novak said with a shrug. "Not a single hair will fall lest the Lord wills it."

It turned my stomach to hear him speak that way.

but I said nothing. He motioned me to sit down and continued in a musing tone:

"The Ukraine. . . . Why, we're already on the way of creating a united Ukraine, and those who but yesterday vacillated, or even were hostile to us, are today joining our ranks to consecrate themselves to this holy cause."

Novak paused, and then inclining his head a little, asked: "I hope, my son, that your being in Chust is not accidental?"

"It is, Father," I replied bluntly. "I have come to ask your help. It is quite possible that, like others, I might have crossed over to this side, but I happened to be away from Uzhgorod at the time."

The tiny wrinkles playing on Novak's face suddenly froze and he listened attentively to my story.

I was nervous, stumbled over my words and, of course, kept silent about the incident with the raftsmen.

"So, Ruzhana and your boy are left behind in Uzhgorod?" he asked as though desiring me to corroborate once more what I had already stated.

"Yes, Father."

"And you have no news of them?"

"None," I replied despairingly. "Do you think you could help me?"

Novak made no reply, but after a moment's consideration, asked:

"Where are you staying in Chust?"

I gave him the address of the Chonkas.

Novak did not write it down. He had a splendid memory. That he could rely upon it was proved to me several days later.

"The Lord be merciful," the priest said to me in farewell. "I promise nothing but I shall think of some way of helping you."

After my talk with Novak, the anxiety I felt in regard to Ruzhana and Ilko increased. Hope would give

way to despair and despair again to hope. I could not sleep and kept tossing on the bench in the furniture shop, breathing the smell of shavings and varnish.

In the day-time, Chonka's house grew empty; in the evening, when all the tenants gathered, it resembled Noah's Arc. In addition to myself, there were three others sleeping in the furniture shop—a pimply ex-student of the Mukachevo Trade Academy, who had dropped his studies to join the Sech, and was as proud as a peacock that he had been recruited to round up Communists; a finance clerk from Uzhgorod; and a grey-haired taciturn man of military bearing, of whom it was said that he had been one of Hetman Skoropadsky's retinue and had arrived in Chust from Berlin.

Two refugee families were huddled in one part of the house, while the most spacious room was occupied by Dulovich, a sturdy, pinkly bald, forty-year-old lawyer, and his wife. Dulovich, employed in the premier's office, was a garrulous, curious, cynical fellow. His cynicism, however, he concealed behind all manner of nationalistic prattle and rapturous singing of Voloshin's praises. A few days after we became acquainted he told me confidentially that he had taken upon himself to write the history of "Voloshin's Ukraine," and even produced a bulky journal with a gold-engraved cover.

"What I have here will serve as source material for the chronicles I hope to write," Dulovich told me.

With no intention of letting me see what was in it, he put the journal back in its place in the cupboard.

This journal is before me now. Chonka's aged father, alive to this day, brought it to Uzhgorod for me. He found it in his cupboard, after Dulovich and Voloshin had made a quick get-away across the border. Dulovich's journal, revealing many unknown facts, fills the gaps in the story of what I had seen in Chust.

... As the days went by, Chust was beginning to resemble more and more an armed camp. Storm-troops, called "Carpathian Sech," were organized, with Father Novak as the moving spirit behind them.

"The soil upon which a Sechovite sets foot," he said, "will be barren for the seeds of Communism."

The Sechovites were on the war-path, scouring villages and towns, hunting down Communists as well as those who gave the least suspicion of being Communist sympathizers. They thrust their victims into the prisons at Tyachev and Chust and handed their property over to those who had informed on them.

Novak held no post in Voloshin's cabinet; his ambition did not run along these lines. Yet there was no one who knew more about the doings and frame of mind of the members of Voloshin's cabinet than Novak. And next to Hoffmann, the German Consul in Chust, he was the one person whom none of the ministers, not excepting Voloshin himself, dared to counter in anything. Voloshin was a well-paid lackey; Novak—the man who did the paying and pulled the strings.

One morning, when the Chonka household was just beginning to waken from its night's slumbers, my host rushed into the shop.

"Somebody is asking for you," he whispered, "hurry, for God's sake."

I dressed quickly and went out into the kitchen. There, warming his hands over the stove, stood a Sechovite, holding a carbine.

"Is your name Belinets?" he asked, looking me up and down.

"Yes, I'm Belinets."

"Come along then. Father Novak is expecting you."

Fifteen minutes later I found myself once again in the room which was already familiar to me.

Novak, who was indisposed, sat in his arm-chair, a black peasant plaid flung over his shoulders. He was sipping something from a steaming cup.

"I've caught cold," he said good-humouredly, "and am treating it with a mixture of hot wine and sugar, a splendid remedy for colds!"

Having said this the priest reached out for the candlestick on his desk, lifted it and, taking from under it a piece of folded paper, handed it to me.

"This is all I was able to do for you so far, my son."

Somewhat puzzled, I unfolded the sheet of paper and could hardly hold back an exclamation of amazement. I could not believe my eyes—the sheet of paper was covered with Ruzhana's small handwriting.

"My dear," she wrote, "we are alive and are overjoyed to hear the same from you. It is so hard without you, so hard! Can really nothing be done for you to rejoin us? Do everything in your power, Ivanko. Love. Ruzhana, Ilko."

My heart was going pit-a-pat, and I was still unable to believe that I held Ruzhana's note in my hand. I did not think of how the message had got to Chust and with whom Ruzhana had sent it. I thought only of Ruzhana's state as she wrote it and the misgivings she must have felt about it ever reaching me at all.

"What does the note say?" Novak asked me in a quiet voice.

I gave him the note.

He read it, and after a slight pause raised his deep-sunken eyes to my face.

"Would you want to have your wife and son here with you?"

"Good God!" I cried. "Can it be done? How?"

"They shall be here if you really wish it," Novak said quietly. "How? . . . It is best not to inquire into that."

"But how can I repay such kindness?" I asked, for his words put me on my guard.

"There is no need for that, my son." Novak smiled amiably. "Do your duty to your people, that is all. You are a Ukrainian. . . . You know, no doubt, that elections to the Seim will be held shortly. The newly-elected Seim will declare the independence of Carpathian Ukraine as well as state our claims in regard to all Ukrainian territories. . . . A united Ukraine!" Novak said musingly. "That is the great hope of all Ukrainians and yours, too, I presume?"

"Most assuredly, Father," I averred, trying hard at the same time to fathom what was behind the priest's words, "but don't you think the idea of a drop of water trying to join an ocean to itself rather ridiculous?"

"Not if the ocean has been promised to us," Novak said, laying particular stress on the last word, "promised by a power which shall rule supreme in the world. The election to the Seim must show our homogeneity and our ability to govern to that gracious power. I shall not conceal the fact from you, my son," Novak, now striking a confidential note, spoke in an undertone, "I shall not conceal the fact that the minds of our people, especially of the inhabitants of Verkhovina, are still blinded. You, my son, enjoy the trust of those mountaineers. They know you in many villages and they will lend an attentive ear to what you say. You must do your bit for our common cause. . . ."

So, that's what he was driving at! In a state of turmoil I rose from the chair.

"You want me to canvass votes for the election. Have I understood you correctly, Father?"

"Yes, we desire you to be one of our trusted men," Novak made no bones about it.

"And my answer will decide whether I shall be reunited with my family or not?"

Novak made no reply. But that it was so was clear to me. No worse torment could have been invented and no more dastardly thing could I be asked to perform.

"I beg your forgiveness, Father," I said, keeping my self-composure, "but I am not the man you need."

"It's too bad," Novak said with a sigh, "too bad. Well, may the Lord keep you."

... At night the Sechovites came for me, ransacking old Chonka's house. I had eluded them, however. Realizing to what danger my refusal to accept Novak's proposal exposed me, I left Chust the very day of my conversation with the priest.

I got away on a chance farm waggon, driven by a glum villager with a timid, long face, who very reluctantly gave me a lift, and kept silent all the way.

At dusk we reached one of the border villages and stopped on its fringe in front of a squat cottage.

"Well, I'm home, Pan," said the villager. "Where do you go?"

"Nowhere," I told him frankly.

"How's that?" the villager was surprised. "Everyone's got a home of some kind."

"Mine is in Uzhgorod."

"So that's it," the man said, scratching the back of his head. "The Magyars got Uzhgorod. You can't get there."

"I know that."

"You know that? What shall I do with you, then? You can't stop with me, it won't do for me to keep a stranger in the house."

"Well then, I'll go; all the same thank you for the ride."

"What d'ye mean you'll go!" the man growled. "Where will you go? Maybe to let them catch you? Get into the house before anyone sees you. I'll put you up for just one night and no more, mind you."

But instead of staying one night I stayed for almost a whole month and got used to my glum host's "Impossible, sir," or "No, sir," meaning quite the contrary. When I mustered up courage one day to tell him of my decision to try once again to cross the border, he clasped his hands in dismay.

"Get it out of your head. It can't be done. God forbid!" he exclaimed.

However, one night, in stormy weather, he woke me up and said: "Come along."

"Where?" I asked, astonished.

"Where do you think? Home to Uzhgorod...."

At first he led me across an open field and then down a long deep gully. The wind carried whirls of prickly snow with a swishing and gritting sound that was like mice rustling under floor-boards.

We stopped in the snow-swept bushes and listened. There was only the murmur of the water ahead of us.

"Go straight ahead across the brook," the man said under his breath. "There is no wire here and no guards."

I was seized by a feeling of uncertainty, but there was no time to stop and think. I clasped the hand of my unselfish friend in farewell and went.

The bottom of the brook was pebbly. I waded through the bitter cold water, which reached above my knees, stepping so lightly as to make the splashes almost inaudible.

Beyond the brook was another field. The snow whirled here, too, in an endless succession of gusts. Icicles dangling from my clothes kept breaking and jingling as I straddled on. After walking across the field I emerged on a road. Though now I knew for certain that I had crossed the border and was on my way to Uzhgorod, to Ruzhana and Ilko, my heart was heavy.

That same night, at a small railway station, I came within sight of the first signs in the Hungarian language and of Horthy's gendarmes.

For over six hours I had been sitting in the long corridor of the Uzhgorod police station, awaiting my turn to be questioned. I had been summoned to testify before what was called the "exoneration commission." It had nothing to do with my having crossed the border, the latter circumstance not being known to anyone except the villager who assisted me, and Ruzhana.

Every now and then one of the steel-grey doors opened and a harsh voice shouted a name. Dozens of terrified eyes followed the man summoned. Then the door would shut with the click of an automatic lock, and a sigh passed along the corridor.

Evening came. Still people waited in suspense, some on benches, others leaning silently against the wall, listening.

A muffled shriek from a distant room sent a chill through the heart. It was repeated—again and again. Then two policemen dragged the victim along the corridor. A man followed, wiping up the blood left on the tiled floor.

I had seen eleven men dragged along the corridor this way. It was not hard to guess that there was a purpose in this—to scare those awaiting the purge at the hands of the "exoneration commission."

A door opened near me. A youth came out, almost a boy, his eyes glazed with terror, his lips trembling. He went quickly to the stairs, looking at nobody, and as he reached them I heard my name called.

I entered a room filled with the harsh light of unshaded lamps. A long table littered with files divided it into two parts, leaving a narrow passageway by the wall. Three men in plain clothes sat at the table. The police officer who had summoned me seated himself at a small side table and began smearing ink over a felt pad.

"Belinets?" asked a man with high cheek-bones and neatly parted dark hair glossy with brilliantine. He did not look at me, but occupied himself with arranging papers in a pile.

"Yes, Ivan Belinets." I answered.

"Nationality?"

"Ukrainian."

There was a pause. The dark-haired man fixed me with hard, insolent eyes.

"There is no such nationality!" he barked harshly.

"Excuse me, but I am a Ukrainian."

"What?!" That came from a man with a dissolute face, who sat next to the dark-haired one. He jumped up, stretching out his neck and looking very much like a gander. "What?" he repeated. "Where d'you think you are? . . . Remember what you're told—there are no Ukrainians, you are a Greek Catholic Magyar. Get that?"

The last words came in a shout. He dropped down into his chair again and began writing something quickly, moving his jaw in time with his hand.

Questions hailed down on me—about my wife, my relations, the people I worked with.

"What can you say in your defence?"

"I don't know what the charge is."

"You don't know, eh?" The dark-haired man's eyes narrowed. "Are you a Communist?"

"Not so far."

"But you've been mixing with them, haven't you? What connections have you got with them now?"

"None at all."

"None, eh? You'd be wiser to tell the truth at once. Well?"

I repeated my answer.

A vein like a dark worm swelled on the man's temple.

"Take him to Boros!" he shouted.

I shuddered involuntarily. It was only a week since

the "commission for investigation and exoneration" had started its work, but the name Boros already roused dread and execration throughout the town.

A policeman appeared from somewhere, took the record of my interrogation from the table, and led me into an adjoining room.

I was passing a long dim corridor, prodded on by the policeman, and tried to suppress a nauseating terror, by which I was suddenly seized.

At the end of the corridor I saw a door—there was only one door there. And behind the door—would be Boros. It seemed then to me that the whole world had narrowed down to that one corridor, to the one door to which I was being led, to the policeman and Boros. To fight off this feeling of stupor I tried to bring to mind memories that were dear to me. I thought of Gorulya, Ruzhana, Kurtinets, my mother and Gafia, my trip to Studenitsa with Ruzhana at my side, the camp-fires along the mountain paths, nocturnal Prague bathed in the light of torches. These thoughts broke through the gloom within me and like sunlight beamed in my soul.

Finally we reached the door. The policeman gave it a jolt and cried: "Boros!"

There were two surprises in store for me. As soon as the door opened I found myself in a cosy room which had photographs on the walls and a divan with embroidered cushions. My first sensation was that I had been escorted to the wrong place, and my second, that surely no one could come to any evil in such surroundings. I waited, expecting the policeman to curse himself for having made a mistake and drag me back. . . . Instead I heard him call again: "Hey, Boros!" A small door, which I had failed to notice before, opened and a man, shuffling his legs, and swallowing down a morsel of food, wallowed into the room. The man was Szabo, Matlakh's ex-secretary—Boros, alias Szabo.

On catching sight of me, he stopped short in the middle of the room and flung out his arms.

"Good heavens, if it isn't Pan Belinets! What an unexpected pleasure, a visit from such an esteemed personage!... You are standing? Pray, sit down... over here, do. Oh, the smudge on the arm-chair, don't mind it. I'll remove it."

He drew out of his pocket something faintly resembling a handkerchief and began wiping the chair quickly, and as he did so blood-stains appeared on the handkerchief.

"There you are," Szabo jabbered on. "Can't tell you how delighted I am to meet an old acquaintance I've always respected highly. True, Pan Belinets, you were a bit squeamish where I was concerned, a bit proud, but I've a weakness for proud people. I'm always delighted to welcome them here. How thoughtless of me!... I almost forgot to ask you how Pani Belinets was. Well? A stunning lady. To this day I see her in my dreams."

He went on in his mocking, jeering manner, revelling in the power he possessed and the immunity from punishment that was his. I looked upon him with deep repugnance, feeling that surely a man like that was not born of woman, and was incapable of any normal human attachments. He was depravity and envy incarnate. Even Mat-lakh could not keep him. Yet the foul wave of fascism had lifted him to its crest, and now at last he was in a position to exercise power over others.

"Now, Pan Belinets, let's come to the little business at hand," Szabo said sugarishly. "I'm told you can't remember the names and addresses of your former friends! What a misfortune to have a poor memory like that! Well, that can easily be remedied. Shall I help you?"

"Well?"

A blow. A sharp pain pierced my whole body. I summoned up all my will-power. Another blow.

Szabo flogged me with a rubber hose and gloated; yet after each blow he cowered back, adjusting his disarranged bow-tie.

I bit my lips till they bled, I could feel the salty taste on my tongue.

"Well?"

That was the only word I heard from Szabo. I began to feel as though it were the only one he knew.

I glared at him with unconcealed contempt. He saw it and his blows grew fiercer. And being beaten up in a room which seemed so peaceful and cosy made the torment all the greater to me.

At last I began to lose consciousness, and they dragged me away down a winding iron staircase. . . .

For several days we were kept in the cellar, fifty of us. Dead silence reigned. Nobody talked for fear of provocateurs.

Once a day jailers brought us foul-smelling skilly and waited in the passage while we emptied the pot. Through the half-open door, I could hear them talking.

"Never been so much work before. There's nowhere to put 'em all—everywhere's packed."

"We're getting rid of some from the third."

"Where are they taken?"

"Different places. . . ."

The cellar had no window and there was no means of telling whether it was day or night. We strained our ears for every sound from outside, hoping to make some guess at the time.

I lay on the floor thinking of Ruzhana and our boy. What would happen to them without me? How small and trivial all former troubles seemed in comparison with our present misfortune. Could it be that the day would come when Boros, and this cellar, and the gloom of enslave-

ment and fear which had descended on our land would be only a memory?

Men were led out of our cellar, and others fresh from Boros' hands were brought in to take their place. I longed for my own uncertainty to end, yet shuddered at the thought of hearing the policeman shout my name and take me up the stairs to Boros again or to the commission.

At last that moment came. Again I stood under the harsh light in front of the table with its dossiers and saw the hateful faces on the other side.

"Belinets!" yelled the dark-haired man. "So you're still alive and well, are you! Boros must have let you off lightly for the first time. But don't think you'll get off so easily again! Finger-prints!"

The police officer placed my fingers one by one on the inked felt, then on a sheet of paper with my name in Hungarian and a number—426. A slight pressure, and the ruled square bore the unique labyrinthine imprint of my finger. I clenched my teeth. Rage, loathing, the bitterness of my insulted human dignity. . . .

"Ready," the police officer rapped out and handed the paper to the dark-haired man. The latter looked at the prints.

"Ineligible for the civil service," he said, half dictating to his neighbour, half addressing me. "Ordered to report at the police station three times a month for registration. . . . You hear that, Belinets? Three times a month for registration. And the rest will depend," he paused significantly, "on how much you love your family, your wife, your son. . . ."

"Ivanko, my dearest!"

Ruzhana ran to the gate to meet me. She was laughing and crying, kissing me, feeling my arms, my

shoulders as though she could not believe I had really returned.

"Well? Ivanko—speak to me—tell me!"

I was glad to find nothing had happened to her, but I had hardly the strength to say a word. . . .

"I've to go three times a month to the police for registration. I can't work in the civil service. . . ."

We went into the house. I myself could hardly believe that I was at home again. I stood for a moment by the bed where our boy was sleeping peacefully, then sank weakly into a chair.

It was some days before I went out—when it was time for me to report at the police station.

I was amazed to see how empty the streets were. The solitary passers-by walked quickly, trying not to look at one another. When a policeman or a police agent from Fencik's Autonomous Nationalist party stalked past, people shrank back to the walls, some with an ingratiating smile, others sullenly.

At the police station the system of delay and annoyance was repeated. I was kept waiting in the yard for hours, questioned, threatened and reminded of my family again.

It was dark when I got home. My study door was open, and the light was burning. Leaves torn from magazines were scattered on the floor, and there were gaps on the bookshelves. I turned round in alarm.

"Who's been here, Ruzhana?"

"*They* have."

"A search?"

"Yes. They came to examine your books—to see whether there were any Soviet ones. I didn't want to let them take the books away, Ivanko, but they. . . ."

I moved Ruzhana to one side, entered the room, and hurried to the shelves. All the books I valued most were missing. I remembered how delighted I had been with

the volume of papers from the Moscow Agricultural Academy sent by Marek from Brno, with Michurin's book, and the volume of poems by Shevchenko which I had got through Svida. Now they were all gone.

"There were four men," said Ruzhana. "They had a motor van. They went from house to house ... and brought out bundles of books."

"Where did they take them, do you know?"

"I heard they were taking them to our warehouse. They're taking books there from the whole town...."

I reached for my hat.

"You're not going there?" cried Ruzhana. "What for?"

I did not know myself what for. It was senseless, rash—but I had to go. Ruzhana came with me.

It was a cloudy evening; occasional gusts of wind came from the mountains, whirling the snow-flakes on the road.

We went down the hill, and as we turned into the familiar street, a smell of smoke assailed our nostrils. It came in gusts at first, but as we walked on it grew thick and acrid.

We hastened our steps. The street curved and we saw the piece of waste-land beside Svida's house. The scene before us had a nightmare quality of insanity.

A huge bonfire was burning in the middle of the open space, lighting up the walls and the silently watching crowd. A dozen drunken Magyarons were moving round the fire. Several vans stood a little to one side. Some were empty, but books were still being flung from others. I could hear the cracking of broken bindings and the rustle and tearing of paper. The drunken louts gathered them up in armfuls, carried them to the fire and hurled them into it with wild howling. For an instant the flames died down and then shot up again, higher, as the men stirred the fire with long poles.

Books were burning. . . . Fragments of charred paper flew over our heads like flocks of frightened birds. The smoke rolled thicker. It was but a shadow of that black cloud which now hung over our Carpathian woodlands. . . .

49

While in Mukachevo, Beregovo and Uzhgorod the "exoneration commission" was "busy," Horthy's blood-wet comb trying to "smooth" things to fit the new order, Sech men were preparing for elections to the Seim in the Voloshin-controlled part of the country.

Before the election campaign was launched, Hoffmann, Hitler's Consul in Chust, asked Novak to pay him a call. Father Novak, being on a friendly footing with the Consul, was always admitted to His Excellency's presence; and frequently, of an evening, the two engaged in confidential talks.

Augustin Voloshin knew of this intimacy and was jealous of it. At times he even suspected Novak of plotting for the premier's post. These suspicions, however, were unfounded, for Novak was far from desiring to be premier.

"My highly esteemed friend," Hoffmann began, "I am a diplomat and must act as such with our honourable friend, Herr Voloshin. With you, it is different, we are friends, and friends must be on the level. . . . So, I'll speak quite plainly to you. The Führer does not doubt that worthy men, having our common cause at heart, will be elected to the Seim. But the electors' votes are one thing, their true sentiments are another, and the latter, let us not fool ourselves, are far from satisfactory. If Voloshin's party does not succeed in winning over to its side the minds of the people, I doubt whether your country may still hope for the role it was designated to play in my Führer's plans."

"In other words you will want a man with a firmer hand than Voloshin?"

"You are quite right," Hoffmann conceded.

"And you will consider Regent Horthy's claims to the whole of Sub-Carpathian Rus?" Novak continued.

"There is no need for elaborating on this," Hoffmann said, evading a direct answer. "At any rate that is precisely what I wished to tell you confidentially, and what it would do well for all the members of the cabinet to bear in mind."

"Do you desire me to remind them of it?" Novak asked.

Hoffmann nodded.

"And now please allow me to speak my mind," Novak said after a pause.

"By all means."

"I wish to assure you, my friend, that your fears are somewhat exaggerated. It is true enough that the Communists have always been a strong influence in these parts, but now the idea of an independent Carpathian Ukraine and the proposed unification of all Ukrainian lands into a single state, is bound to capture the minds and hearts of the people. Next to religion I know no force more powerful than nationalist feeling. You will not deny that Communist ideas had a strong hold on the minds of the German people. What hold have they now?"

Hoffmann's face twisted into a smile.

"I bow before your greater wisdom . . . and wish you success. All the same I beg you not to forget the import of our little talk."

Hectic days had set in for Voloshin and his party. Novak himself was now rarely to be found in Chust. He hurried from village to village, organizing election meetings, making speeches, pleading with the people, and, where pleading was of no avail, threatening. However, busy as he was with the election campaign, Novak con-

tinued to follow closely all that was happening in the Horthy-occupied towns. Follow is hardly the word. He did more than that, he aided the occupants by sending secret information to them and by recommending reliable agents. Many of his minions served in Horthy's secret police.

The election was held on March 12. Voloshin, rolling upwards his bespectacled foxy eyes, tried hard to conceal the true state of affairs from Hoffmann, painting in roseate colours the spirit of unity and the peace and order that reigned at the election. The German Consul, however, knew of the many thousands of fake ballots with which the Sech men had filled the boxes, and of the villages where force had to be used to drive the people to the polls. He knew that twenty-five thousand votes were openly cast against Voloshin's party and that over fifty thousand had abstained from voting altogether. In a word, he knew that Pan Voloshin had little to boast of. However, he merely knit his brows and did not say a word.

The deputies arrived in Chust for the opening of the Seim. Voloshin was in high spirits. The night before the President of the Czechoslovak Republic Hácha had signed away in Berlin Czechia and Moravia, which became German protectorates. The Czechoslovak Republic had ceased to exist. This, he knew, greatly facilitated the declaration of the independence of Sub-Carpathian Ukraine.

The Seim opened. However, no sooner was it done with the ceremony of declaring the "independence" of Carpathian Ukraine, and before even the applause died down in the hall, than word came of Horthy's invasion. Along with the German army which marched to occupy Czechia and Moravia, Horthy's troops, having torn down the barbed-wire entanglements, crossed the border to Carpathian Ukraine.

Panic seized the deputies. Voloshin dashed off to the German Consulate. He ran so fast that his secretary, and Dulovich, his "historiographer," could hardly keep at his heels.

"Sir, your fur coat, sir, you've left behind your fur coat!" Dulovich screamed, dragging the premier's heavy coat behind him.

Hoffmann's man-servant blocked the premier's way.

"His Excellency is not at home."

Brushing him aside, Voloshin broke into the Consul's private apartments.

With an expression of annoyance on his face, Hoffmann rose to meet Voloshin. The Consul was in dressing-gown and soft slippers.

"Your Excellency," Voloshin uttered, "I have taken the liberty of disturbing you. Will you have the goodness to explain to me what it all means?"

"What precisely?" Hoffmann inquired suavely.

"Are you not aware of the fact, sir," Voloshin cried, "that the Hungarian troops have crossed the border and are advancing towards Chust?"

"Oh that," Hoffmann drawled. "That is nothing to get so agitated over."

"Stop them!"

The Consul shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should I? I am convinced that Admiral Horthy will cope with the situation, where you have failed to do so. Our mutual friend here, Father Novak, is of the same mind, and it would do well for you, too, to agree."

Only then did Voloshin and Dulovich, who was standing in the doorway, notice the figure of Novak sitting in a dim corner of the room, his long, thin fingers clenched on his chest.

"Traitor!" Voloshin flung at him. "I knew a long time ago that the Hungarians had bought you. Your men are 'free of frontiers.'"

"You are unfair to me," Novak interrupted him calmly. "We are all God's children and we all serve Him alone."

"What now?" addressing himself to no one in particular, and rubbing his grey, close-cropped head, Voloshin said.

"Leave the country," Hoffmann advised.

"Where shall I go?"

"You may go anywhere you please. But before you leave, make sure your men don't do anything rash. They may get it into their heads to fight the regent's soldiers. Every shot fired at a soldier of the regent will be taken for a shot at a soldier of the Führer."

This conversation was the last entry made in Dulovich's journal. That was the end of Voloshin's reign—an ignominious end to an inglorious reign.

Novak did not flee with Voloshin. He was in Chust to meet Horthy's men and was arrested by them at his own request. In a month's time, however, he was released. He returned to Uzhgorod and took up once more the modest duties of a parish priest. This, he found very convenient; he continued to issue orders to his minions, helping the invaders "to establish order."

50

Matlakh's time had come at last.

Despite his obvious sympathy for Voloshin's party, this Verkhovina werewolf behaved in a very odd manner. He kept unobtrusively in the background and seemed to be saying: "Pay no attention to me, lads, do whatever you have to do, I'll lie low for a while and watch, so I can see how things are turning out and whether it will pay me to join you."

Matlakh's visits to Chust were now few and far between. He avoided political talk and whenever he

happened to be involved in any, never committed himself.

"I am a sick man," he replied when reproached by political cronies whose views he had once shared. "I've got my farms, my own burden of cares...."

All this was just a spoof.

After sizing up the situation, Matlakh realized that the Voloshin regime was short-lived and that he, Matlakh, better not have his finger in it.

When Matlakh learned that his name figured in the nominee lists to the Seim, he took to his bed. Voloshin's trusted representatives came from Chust to Studenitsa for his consent to run in the election, and found themselves at the bedside of a dying man. The room reeked of drugs and there was an elderly priest, fully arrayed for the occasion and solemnly waiting for the dying man to breathe his last.

The disappointed callers took their leave as quickly as possible, expressing to Matlakh's aggrieved wife the hope for her husband's speedy recovery and that he might yet be a deputy to the Seim.

Matlakh's "death agonies," however, lasted only so long as it was necessary for his name to be struck off the list of nominees and to be replaced by another, no longer.

Chust was not destined to see Matlakh in the role of deputy to the Seim, but it did see him as one of a delegation sent by the "grateful population" to welcome the invaders.

A hefty man-servant wheeled Matlakh's chair into the square. Matlakh sat in it, holding in his outstretched hands a tray with an offering of bread and salt as a token of the hospitality of Verkhovina's rich.

"I appreciate your devotion to the crown of St. Stephen," said a Horthy officer as he accepted the offering. "We have set foot upon its ancient territories to put

an end to the Czech and Communist yoke. . . . And now, gentlemen, please return to your homes."

After this brief ceremony Matlakh asked to be taken to the telegraph office. There, he dispatched a congratulatory telegram to Horthy, the Hungarian regent, and was wheeled back to Studenitsa.

"Thank the Lord for having heard our prayers and at last sent us a real master," he said at home. "Now the rabble will have to sing small."

With his usual energy Matlakh set about carrying out his plans.

The first thing he did was drive all "debtors" off their land. Dmitro Solyak who tried to protest was flogged to death by the gendarmes in front of the Studenitsa inn.

His trap drawn by a pair of well-fed horses, Matlakh raced from village to village and from one part of the country to the other, buying from the invaders for a song the peasants' confiscated land, cattle, and all—down to the last crumbling hut.

Gorulya's cottage, requisitioned by the invaders, was also bought by Matlakh.

This piece of news cut me to the quick. The cottage where, with Gorulya's help, my schooling had begun and which to me was so linked with memories of him and Gafia, this Verkhovina cottage that had become my paternal home, and the recollection of which was a comfort and inspiration to me in the bitterest moments of my life, now belonged to Matlakh, and I was utterly powerless to do anything about it.

On Easter-day, when the village folk were returning from church, a waggon loaded with straw drew up at Gorulya's cottage. Matlakh came wheeling down behind it.

"Well, get a move on, carry the straw in and scatter it around!" Matlakh said to the men who came with the waggon.

The men rushed to carry out their master's orders. They took armfuls of straw from the waggon, carried it into the cottage and placed it around the outside walls.

A crowd of villagers was attracted to the cottage. Not quite understanding what Matlakh's men were about, they watched them sullenly, with a foreboding of evil.

"Petro, what's up your sleeve?" Grandad Gritsan asked him.

"That's no business of yours," answered Matlakh. "The cottage is mine and I can do with it whatever I please."

"It is not yours," the old man said, shaking his head. "You bought it, but all the same it is not yours. It is Gorulya's."

"Gorulya's?" Matlakh made a wry face. "Where is that Gorulya of yours?"

"When he comes, what will you say to him?"

"Hey, boys, hand me some straw!" Matlakh cried.

One of the men hurried to him with a bundle of straw.

Matlakh, breathing heavily, began furiously twisting the straw, lighted a wisp and flung it together with the box of matches into the open door of the cottage.

Clouds of smoke rolled out, followed by tongues of flame licking the dry cottage walls.

Matlakh turned to the speechless onlookers.

"Well? That's the end of Gorulya. Not a smell of him left."

Matlakh stayed to watch the fire until the last tongue of flame died out.

... Every day brought fresh, terrible news. Concentration camps were quickly set up one after another on the outskirts of towns. The nights were filled with arrests and round-ups, and the bodies of shot men were cast up on the banks and stony shoals of the Uzh, Latoritsa and Tisza. Their hands bound with barbed wire, the dead men

would lie there for weeks, and the peasants on pain of death were forbidden to bury them.

Those who still managed to keep out of prison were gripped by fear, grinding fear that was wearing their souls away and making a torment of their freedom.

Soon after the police let me out, Szabo made his appearance in our home.

"I've decided to pay you a call, for old acquaintance's sake," he said, sprawling all over an arm-chair. "I picked Sunday when it's best to find you and your charming wife at home!" he said, looking up at Ruzhana. "I hope your husband told you that I see you in my dreams."

Ruzhana flushed with indignation and disgust. I had decided to hold my tongue but could not contain myself any longer.

"You rat," I said through clenched teeth. "Get out!"

Fear flashed in Szabo's deep-sunken eyes and he thrust out his arms as though to shield himself. In an instant, however, he recollected himself, and with his fingers over his mouth, began to guffaw contentedly.

"Ha, ha, ha! So, you've lost your temper at last and I've caught you at it. Can't stand people who keep silent . . . it makes me jittery. What a shame you didn't open your mouth the day you paid me a visit, Pan Belinets. Just one yell, that's all; when it hurts you should yell. It always makes me feel kindly disposed."

Ruzhana turned to leave the room. I realized how obnoxious the words of this paltry, contemptible creature were to her. But he stopped her.

"I'll accompany you, Pani . . . to take a look at your home!"

He strutted about our place, looking in everywhere, opening cupboards, rummaging.

"You're not too well off, Pan Belinets," he observed with an assumed tone of sympathy. "I've got clients who are far more comfortable."

From that day on he came regularly, every Sunday, at the same hour. We waited for his visit in a state of terror, never sitting down but always standing while he was in the house, hoping all the time that he would go and the nightmare would end.

But no sooner the door closed behind him than we would be filled with dread anticipation of the visit he was bound to pay the next week.

We were not the only ones Szabo kept an eye on. He made the rounds of all those who had at one time or another had a taste of his torture-chamber, in the same way that Father Novak made the rounds of the parish.

I cannot tell whether Szabo was ordered to make these "calls" or whether he did so on his own. But whatever the reason, there was but one purpose: to crush our souls, to trample on our human dignity, and keep us in a perpetual state of fear. Szabo delighted in the tortures he inflicted and mocked in his dastardly way at the things which all men hold dear and which he had been denied. I often thought that his blows were easier to bear than his calls.

51

One day through the stifling gloom enveloping us came a piece of news from beyond the mountains—a reminder that we were not forgotten, a ray of hope that the night would not be eternal.

It was September. In the day-time the sun still shone hotly, but the nights were cool and the breeze from the hills brought the feeling that autumn was near.

After I was discharged from the Forestry Board, I looked in vain for another job and for a long time we had great difficulty in making ends meet.

It was an evening when I worked until late in my green-house, preparing it for the winter. I made myself

go on working, although all too often I felt that it was futile. "Why am I doing all this?" I asked myself as I looked at the boxes filled with soil and the seed ready for sowing. "Who needs my work with grasses now, when there's such terrible, hopeless misery all round?" But although it seemed like flying in the face of common sense, I kept on at my experiments with the stubbornness of a man pushing through a blizzard towards a far-distant light, barely seen.

The meum and alpine clover I sowed came up emerald green. I exposed them to the morning frosts which came early that year. Some perished, but others bore up. I helped them gain strength, and they grew strong and enduring, like a symbol of indomitable life.

It was nearly midnight. This was the police hour—the hour for searches, round-ups, arrests.

I had filled the last two boxes with soil, made a few notes and was about to go in, when I heard footsteps approaching the green-house and muted voices that made me stop and listen. The next moment Ruzhana and the marble-cutter, Sandor Lobanyi, came down the earthen steps.

Those were days when people lived isolated and apart, avoiding one another for fear of attracting the notice of the police. Only something extraordinary could have induced Lobanyi to come to me at that late hour.

"Nothing bad's happened," he said as he entered the green-house. "You needn't take me for a bearer of ill tidings. I just wanted to see you," and he seated himself on an empty box. "What's the news?"

"What kind of news can there be these days?" I said despondently.

"So that's what you think, is it?" The old man was smiling.

"What is it—Poland?"

"You're surely not going to talk out here?" Ruzhana interrupted. "Come into the house."

"I'm quite comfortable here." Lobanyi cast a glance around. "We'd better stay where we are." Then he went on: "You asked if there was any news from Poland?"

"Yes. But I don't see what news there can be. In another week or two Hitler'll have it all. It's not enough to have brave soldiers, you've got to have honest men to lead them, not traitors."

"You're right. Plenty of traitors there."

I could see, however, that Lobanyi was thinking of something else. I looked at him expectantly.

"But Hitler won't get Galicia!" he declared jubilantly at last, and his eyes sparkled. "Galicia's luckier than we are. Stalin's ordered the Red Army to go and defend it, and they've already crossed the Polish border."

I jumped up so quickly from my seat on the box beside Lobanyi that I nearly knocked down a tray of pots with my experimental grasses.

"Who . . . who told you that?"

"Molotov. And he'll tell you too, if you just turn on the wireless."

I ran into the house and turned the knobs with trembling fingers. It seemed an age before the valves warmed up. There were fragments of music, voices—and then through the statics, far away, now clear, now faint, I heard a calm, impressive voice.

"There you are! That's it! Moscow's been repeating it several times," cried Lobanyi, seizing my arm. He and Ruzhana stood beside me, their faces tense and alight as we listened to the distant voice of Moscow. . . .

A lucky chance helped Chonka to get me a cashier's job with a Budapest timber firm which was opening an office in Uzhgorod.

The office was in charge of felling timber in Verkhovina, floating it down the Tisza and then sending it by way of the Danube to a furniture factory in Budapest. My job was to make the rounds of the lumber-camps in the mountains and raftsmen's settlements along the Tisza several times a month, and pay the men.

One day I made a trip to Verkhovina. Everybody there was saying that the Red Army had been sent to liberate not only Galicia, but our region too. How they longed for it to be true!

Everywhere there was a feeling of eager expectation.

The villages by the Volovets, Uzhok and Jasina passes were preparing a welcome. The women had embroidered cloths ready for the bread and salt, the peasant families had brought to a hiding-place handfuls of flour to bake special holiday cakes. The wood-cutters, railway-men and villagers had got together in secret and laid their plans for preventing the Horthy men from blowing up any bridges.

But as time passed, it became clear to all that the Soviet Army would go only as far as the Hungarian border.

On my way back I visited my old friend Fyodor Skripka, and found him gloomy and thoughtful.

"The time hasn't come yet," he said despondently, "not for us, it hasn't." Then he brightened a little and added: "But it's good they're so near, eh, Ivanko?"

It was time for me to return to Uzhgorod, but I lingered, I felt that I could not go at such a time, and stopped on the pretext of checking the wood-cutters' pay-lists. Fyodor Skripka invited me to stay with him.

One night I was awakened by a quiet voice which in my sleepy state I did not at once recognize.

"Ivan, get up!"

I rose quickly. A figure loomed vaguely in the dim light reminiscent of floating clouds of tobacco-smoke.

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Semyon. Come, Ivan, the Soviet soldiers are here."

"Where?"

"They're on the border."

I started to dress swiftly, fumbling and unable to find the arm-holes in my excitement.

"Have you seen them, Semyon?"

"No. They only came yesterday. Olena Shtefak's boy came to tell us."

"Who's going?"

"You and me, and Fyodor Skripka...."

It was the hour before dawn. The chill breath of the mountains met us as we left the cottage. Everything was silent. The stars twinkled in the dark blue of the sky. A long scarf of mist was drifting down into the Studenitsa valley, clinging to the tops of the lower trees as if reluctant to move.

Sounds carried amazingly—a distant stream seemed to be racing over the stones right beside the path we followed up the mountain.

It was about five miles to the border. The path wound among the spurs, rising all the time. We climbed to the top of one rise only to be confronted by a second and a third, until it seemed there was no end to these slumbering blue heights.

We walked in silence. Only once, as we turned from the path into the forest, Semyon looked round at me.

"Listen, Ivan, if we meet anyone—and we might meet soldiers here—you say you're going to the foresters, and we're showing you the way. All right?"

Day was breaking, the stars were disappearing and the sky becoming lighter. Suddenly the sun burst forth

from behind the mountains, shedding its warm gold on all the world around.

We walked about two hundred paces to the edge of the forest, turned to the left, came out upon a sloping meadow, and stopped.

A deep narrow mountain valley ran north and south. On the opposite rise stood a number of white houses, a red flag waving over one of them. I could see soldiers in the yard. Both the men and the flag were quite near—only the narrow valley and the road separated us. I could clearly see the bright-green caps of the soldiers. I almost thought I could distinguish their features. A short run down the meadow, a few steps across the road—and one would be among them, in that other, free world!

My heart beat quickly, painfully.

"Mother of God," said Skripka. "So close!" He cupped his ear with his hand and listened intently.

"I hear 'em! I hear 'em!" he cried suddenly. "Ivanko! Semyon! I heard them say: 'Comrade!'"

"You didn't hear anything, *Vuiku*," said Semyon. "You only thought you did."

Skripka bristled up.

"Yes I did! I heard them!"

Semyon and I strained our ears, but try as we would we distinguished nothing.

A crowd of villagers was approaching the house with the red flag over its roof. Now the cries and exclamations carried even to us, although we could not make out any words. The soldiers mingled with the peasants and we could see people shaking hands, see their glad excitement.

I looked at Semyon. He was very pale and bit his lip as he watched everything on the other side of the frontier, unable to tear his eyes away.

After a little while, two Soviet soldiers in capes, with rifles slung over their shoulders, detached themselves from the crowd.

Outside the gate they stopped, unslung their rifles, loaded them, slung them again, descended to the hill and walked along in single file, calmly and unhurriedly.

We tore off our caps and began waving them wildly. Semyon took a few steps forward and shouted: "*A-go-ov!*"¹

The Red Army men turned their heads in our direction, then continued at the same pace along the road, looking at us. Again Semyon shouted: "*A-go-ov!*" and the shout echoed somewhere above our heads.

It was no echo, however. I turned, looked up and saw people standing on the height. They were strung out in a line, waving hands and caps. These were wood-cutters, villagers, women and children who like us had come to the frontier. A few ran down to where we were standing on the meadow, to get closer, and the others followed. First came a young wood-cutter in a broad leather belt. I recognized Yurko. He was followed by a young woman carrying a baby. Every now and then Yurko turned to her, evidently offering assistance, but she only shook her head.

Suddenly the woman stopped, looked at the bushes fringing the forest and gave a startled cry. The next moment Hungarian frontier guards appeared. The people stopped in confusion, then began scrambling back towards the crest.

"Stop!" Yurko shouted vexedly. "D'you want those over there to see us showing our heels to the fascists? Let the fascists fear us, not we them!"

Yurko's voice, strong and mocking, sobered the people. They advanced and gathered in a tight knot round him. A few steps, and Semyon, old Skripka and I were there too.

"Keep your heads, lads," said Skripka blinking, and

¹ A call common in the Carpathian Mountains.—*Ed.*

glanced at the approaching gendarmes. "They may start shooting."

Instead of replying, Yurko said: "Forward, lads! Women and children, and you, Grandad"—turning to Skripka—"stop back here!"

Skripka's wrinkled face paled, then red flecks appeared on it.

"You're young yet to tell me what to do, you pup!" He stamped his bare foot. "You hadn't been born or thought of when Old Kurtinets and Gorulya and I..." he did not finish, but thrust out his hollow chest and turned to face the gendarmes.

They were already quite close, climbing the rise. An officer marched in front, bawling threats and curses at us.

I took my place alongside Yurko and Skripka.

The men on the other side of the frontier were looking at us. The two Red Army men on the road had stopped. One of them took off his green cap, wiped the inside of his cap-band with his hand and raised the cap high over his head before replacing it. Not only I, but everyone noticed it.

"Long live the Red Army! Long live Stalin!" shouted Yurko, forgetting everything, and the echo rolled away through the mountains: "Stalin!"

Our gnawing fear of the officer and gendarmes suddenly vanished, to be replaced by something that was the very opposite of fear, something a hundred times stronger.

The officer was now running. His face was suffused with rage.

"Disperse!" he shouted. "Disperse or we'll fire!"

"You don't dare," said Yurko with amazing calm. "Two hundred million Soviet people are watching you from that side, Pan Gendarme."

The officer involuntarily flinched and looked round, as though the two hundred million Soviet people were indeed standing on the other side watching him sternly.

"Rabble!" he shouted and advanced on Yurko. "I order you—disperse at once!"

"That, Pan Gendarme, will be as the folk decide."

Ignoring the gendarme as though he did not exist, Yurko turned to the crowd.

"Good people," he said, "there's a suggestion that we go back quietly, you hear, quietly and calmly, to our villages. Raise your hands, those who are for it."

Yurko was the first to raise his hand, and the others did the same.

"Well," said Yurko, and his eyes were smiling. "Since the folk have decided, let it be so. . . . Women and children in front, but don't run. We're walking on our own land!"

The women began to climb the rise, followed by the others. Yurko went last, without even a glance at the dumbfounded officer.

"There's a lad for you!" Skripka whispered delightedly. "A born minister! Eh?"

When I reached the crest, I turned. The gendarmes were climbing after us, but on the other side of the frontier the scarlet flag glowed over the house in the first rays of the sun.

When we were over the crest, Yurko came up to me. He was excited although he tried to conceal it.

"You must get away quickly," he said. "There's a lot of us here, we all look alike, but the gendarmes will notice you because of your clothes."

"Thanks, I will, but what are you going to do?"

"I?" Yurko thought for a moment. "I'll just see that they don't touch the people, get my wife and boy down to the village, and then I'll think of something."

"If I was your age, I'd go over there," said Skripka.

Yurko shook his head.

"No, I mustn't go, Grandad, I've got work enough to

do here. . . . Well, good-bye, maybe we'll see each other sometime."

But I never saw him again. Two hours after I left the villagers near the forester's house, about fifty gendarmes surrounded the wood-cutters and tried to seize Yurko. His comrades would not give him up and the gendarmes opened fire. The men attacked them with axes, killed the officer and succeeded in breaking through. But Yurko was mortally wounded. He died fully conscious, very quietly. His only words were spoken just before his death to the comrades carrying him: "Don't forget, lads, what you're living for. And don't forget me either. When our own men come over the mountains, knock on my grave."

They buried him near the pass, beside the path along which four years later his wife Maria led a Soviet battalion one autumn night into the rear of the Nazi troops holding the pass. And today one can read the short inscription burned into the wooden cross over his grave: "Yurko, they have come!"

52

All the lights burned in the old church on Tsegolnyanskaya Street as though it were a holiday, and Father Novak offered up prayers for victory, for Horthy, that glorious warrior, and for his allies.

Surely, never before in his life had the Spiritual Father prayed with such fervour as on that warm June day of 1941; one would have said that he was not asking God for victory, but demanding it of him.

War!

It was a long time since broad glades had been ruthlessly cut through all the forests covering the mountains by the Soviet border, so that the whole district could be overlooked. People had been rounded up in the villages and driven off to build fortifications on the passes. But

now, everything which only yesterday had been a matter of guess-work, assumption and rumour had become a reality. War against the Soviet Union! War!

The word had a terrible sound. I could hardly grasp its whole tragedy at once.

There was another wave of persecution. Gendarmes armed with machine-guns were stationed even in the most remote mountain villages. They tried to arrest Verkhovina villagers for refusing to go and work in Germany, but the people met them with axes and sticks and after bloody clashes took to the forest.

Our native language was banned. Teachers who continued to use it were deported to Hungary.

"On pain of death..." These words opened almost every order or proclamation.

Szabo discontinued his rounds. He had enough to do now without bothering about us. But we felt little relief.

Again I was summoned to the police station where the man who looked like a gander fixed his pale eyes on me and announced: "You will come here for registration every three days, with your wife. Understand?"

I heard the order with a vindictive joy which I took care not to show. This war was with the Soviet Union; so what could any precautions of miserable police officials avail against the mighty force which was advancing to fight fascism?

Like the majority of people in our region, I was firmly convinced of the strength and impregnability of the Soviet Union. This assurance was so strong that it could not be shaken even by the first victorious trumpetings from Hitler's headquarters, or the bitter knowledge that Soviet towns and villages were burning, that fascist tanks were pushing eastward, crushing the ripening grain in Soviet fields.

"No, no, it can't go on this way!" I told myself firmly, pacing up and down the room where Chonka and

Ruzhana were sitting speechless and perplexed by the wireless.

Budapest was broadcasting a programme recorded on the battle-field. We could hear the roar of tanks, indistinguishable words of command, the menacing boom of explosions, and the quick jabber of words as the Nazi correspondent described what was taking place.

"Seventy-two miles from the frontier. The battle is raging round a big railway station. On the left there's a half-built house, with the scaffolding still up. The Russians have taken cover in it and are resisting stubbornly. . . . Now . . . in a minute they'll be finished off—four tanks are opening fire on the house. You hear—the first shot, a second, a third! The scaffolding is ablaze! . . . A tremendous sight! . . . The Russian firing-points are blotted out. We can go on. . . . The tanks are crossing the railway line, followed by the infantry. Seventy-two miles from the frontier!"

Ruzhana pressed closer to her little Ilko who looked from one to the other of the grown-ups in surprise.

"Ivan! Vasill!" she whispered. "Are they really so strong?"

I did not answer. I was thinking of something else. "Seventy-two miles from the frontier!"

"No," I said aloud. "Something's got to happen. . . ."

"And you . . . are you quite sure, Ivanko, that it will all change?" asked Ruzhana.

"I'm certain of it!"

For me, as for every honest person, the expectation of that change was the only thing that gave life any meaning. People realized that on this war depended the destiny, the very existence of all peoples, it was a fight between freedom and slavery, between life and death.

But time went by, and the black clouds did not disperse.

A large map of the fronts had been hung up in the window of a stationer's shop which I passed nearly every

day. Each morning at the same hour the enterprising stationer, a podgy Hungarian, covered the new territory conquered by the Germans with brown paint. He did it with pedantic care, with the irritating neatness of a petty, limited mind.

People would stop by the window to watch him; I stopped too, my heart contracting painfully as I waited to see where the brush with its brown paint would go today. Like the plague that brown smear spread farther and farther east, blotting out the blue ribbons of rivers and the bright rings that meant towns. It crossed the Dnieper, oozed south, surrounded Leningrad. Could nobody dam its poisonous flow, had we nothing left to hope for? My breath caught desperately. I walked quickly away, but I felt as though that accursed brush were following me, spreading its heavy, dead brown over the houses, the people, the blue of the sky.

In those terrible days our own troubles retreated into the background. We could think of nothing but the fighting in Russia.

The wood-cutters in the mountains, usually somewhat reserved with me, would wait for an opportune moment, come up one by one, and ask: "Any good news yet, sir?... How is it over there?"

"Nothing yet," I would answer.

Some would move away in silence, others, after hanging about for a while, would burst out:

"Eh, it's high time there was, high time!"

In those days my thoughts turned more than ever before to Gorulya and Kurtinets. How I needed them now! Gorulya was far away, and Kurtinets?... Had he managed to escape, or had he like hundreds of his comrades been tortured to death in cells and concentration camps? But somehow, deep down in my heart, I felt a strange assurance that Kurtinets was alive, that he was here, in our district.

The wish to find Kurtinets began to obsess me. Finally I decided to make an attempt to seek him out. . . . But how was I to go about it in those terrible times, when people avoided even their closest friends, and a single careless word could bring down irreparable catastrophe? Nevertheless, I made up my mind to try.

Patiently, stubbornly, as though feeling my way in the dark, I began tracing people who had been friendly with Kurtinets, but alas!—I could find no sign of any. Sometimes I thought that Lobanyi was a man who might have been able to help me, but he had left Uzhgorod and I had lost touch with him. When it seemed as though all my efforts would prove vain, I suddenly thought of the forest ranger Imre Gevizi in whose cottage I had met Gorulya. Gevizi was still working, but he had been moved to the Tisza forests, not far from the place where I went to pay the raftsmen. This was the only man associated in my mind with Gorulya and Kurtinets, who had not disappeared. I decided to see him at the earliest opportunity.

The forest ranger made me welcome, but no sooner had I cautiously hinted the purpose of my visit than he looked uneasy and assured me that he knew nothing and nobody, and as for what he might have known before, it was no time now to remind him, a Hungarian, about it. His job was with the forest, he had nothing to do with anything else, and I, too, had better forget what I had once seen in the cottage by the Uzhok.

My presence obviously worried my host, and I hastened to go.

Gevizi did not stop me, but walked with me through the maize-field.

"Eh, sir, how easy it is for a man to get into bad trouble for nothing at all!" he said as he moved aside the leaves of maize hanging over the path. "Somebody gets an idea into his head—and you're done for!"

"Don't worry, Gevizi, I'm not going to denounce you," I said, mortified.

He stopped, and his face twitched.

"That wasn't what I meant at all," he answered, embarrassed. "I never had any doubts. . . . If I could possibly help you, I would! Please believe me! . . ."

I said nothing.

"Have *you* seen Pan Kurtinets somewhere recently?" Gevizi unexpectedly asked, searching my face.

I was instantly alert.

"No, I haven't. Why?"

"I thought you might have been meeting him somewhere round about here." Gevizi sounded relieved, and he at once took leave of me.

We parted and followed our different ways.

My last hope of finding out something about Kurtinets had vanished.

53

Evening was falling and from behind the maize-fields a great golden harvest moon rose slowly in the pale sky. Mist veiled the river as it surrendered its warmth to the cooler evening air. The ferry moved slowly, creaking, the water rippling and whirling round the flat-bottomed boats beneath its wooden floor.

At this point the Tisza ceased to be a mountain river; emerging into the valley, its nature altered: it became broader and quieter. But the river did not at once lose its rapid flow; and the ferryman had his work cut out to cope with it.

A country cart with two long-horned oxen was also crossing to the left bank, and so were two riders who had arrived at the last moment—a Hungarian officer and a soldier, evidently his orderly.

A woman sat on the cart, muffled in a rough black shawl that made her look like some huge sleeping bird. The soldier held the well-matched black horses. Scenting the water, they snorted, stamped on the boards, champed their bits and tossed their heads as though trying to free themselves from the hand on the bridle. The officer, like myself, rested his elbows on the rail and stared down at the gleaming water.

Neither the loveliness of the autumn evening nor the quiet beauty of the scene could give me any pleasure. Everything around me seemed false and hostile. I felt a particular hatred for the officer whose sudden appearance on the bank had made the ferryman pull back, although he had already cast off. I could not see the officer's face in the darkness, but my gorge rose at his proximity. Tomorrow he, too, might herd his men into a troop-train smelling of carbolic, and set off *there*, into the heart of Russia, to burn, ravage and destroy all that men had created for happiness.

I tried not to look in his direction, but now and then my eyes were drawn in a quick glance, and I had the feeling that he sometimes cast a look at me too, which made me go over to the opposite side and help the man pull the ferry along by the cable that stretched from bank to bank.

That morning the manager had sent for me.

"I've had a telephone call from the raftsmen's camp," he said. "There seems to be some misunderstanding. Two of the raftsmen complain that they've been underpaid."

"That's impossible!" I said hotly.

"I don't know anything about that," the manager said, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't want to say anything against you, but you'd better go there today and settle matters."

That was how I came to be on the ferry crossing the Tisza.

The keel grounded gently. A wave rippled back, and the ferryman with an accustomed movement quickly pushed the gangway over to the sloping bank.

I waited for the bullock-cart to get off, then left the ferry and walked along the rutted road, now empty. It was not more than three miles to the village where the raftsmen lived.

It had become lighter; the golden tint had faded from the moon and it cast a faint bluish light.

The officer and his orderly had not mounted. They, too, were walking. I could hear the creaking of their boots behind me and the clapping of the horses' hoofs on the stones.

I slowed down and moved to the side of the road to let them pass. The soldier with the horses lagged behind, but the officer overtook me and for a moment walked beside me, in step, tapping the shaft of his top-boot with a twig. For some reason I listened to the sound as one listens to the hypnotic ticking of a clock. Suddenly the tapping stopped and the officer said very softly: "How d'you do, Pan Belinets."

I guessed rather than recognized the voice, and stopped short, staring at the officer. Even in the moonlight I barely recognized him. There had not been those deep folds at the mouth before, nor those dark hollows round the eyes; only the rather heavy, determined chin still jutted out in the same resolute way. Kurtinets!

It was some time before my power of speech returned to me.

"It's you! . . . I've been trying so hard to find you!"

"Well, here I am, you see. . . . It's like the old saying—'The game comes of itself to a good hunter.'" Turning to the soldier, he asked: "How do we go?"

"It's not far. By a path on the left. That'll be the best place."

He pulled the bridle and went ahead; we followed in silence.

Kurtinets did not ask me how I came to be on the ferry at that time of night, where I was going and why, and suddenly I realized that he had no need to ask, he knew. My talk with Gevizi, the telephone call to the office, the raftsmen's complaint and now my meeting with Kurtinets, all fell into the same pattern, and the night which I had felt so hostile and dangerous was now filled with unseen friends ready to give warning of danger and to render assistance at any moment.

A boundary-ditch overgrown with dry grass led us from the road through a field of ripe maize. We walked for ten or fifteen minutes and the maize began to thin out. Ahead lay a meadow with haystacks standing here and there.

The soldier stopped, looked round and listened. Then he silently handed the bridle to Kurtinets and walked away. A few minutes later he returned, but from the opposite direction.

"It's all right here," he said confidently, took the bridle again and led the horses away to one side.

"Let's sit down," Kurtinets suggested, and settled himself on the ground. I sat beside him on the edge of the ditch.

"It's a long time since we've seen each other," said Kurtinets. "And now when we do—it's night again."

"But this night is darker than all the others..."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "That's true, it's darker. But I am quite sure that the time will come when we shall meet in the full light of day."

Kurtinets looked at me and I could see that he understood all that was seething inside me.

"Yes, bright days will come for us too," he repeated confidently.

He took a cigarette from his pocket and rolled it for a long time in his fingers, without lighting up.

"So you tried to find me?"

"Yes."

"How did you know that . . . well, that I was still alive?"

"I didn't, I knew nothing, how could I? But I felt you were, I was sure of it, and I made up my mind to find you."

"You were taking a pretty big risk."

"Perhaps I was. But I couldn't go on living like this."

"Was there something you needed to tell me?"

"No," I said, "I want to know what's going on, and to ask your advice."

As calmly as I could, I began to tell Kurtinets of all I had been thinking, all I had been feeling.

He listened without interrupting. I could no longer see his face, I could see only his broad back with the tightly fit jacket.

"What's happening over *there*?" I said. "Is it really all over, must we believe those terrible reports that the Soviet Army is cracking up? But it's impossible, it's simply inconceivable that fascism could conquer!"

"It cannot conquer," said Kurtinets quietly, throwing away the fragments of the cigarette which he had never lighted. "It cannot conquer—not because it is weak, no, it is still very strong, but because it has raised its hand against something which is unconquerable! It is impossible to conquer that which is instinct with life, which brings the people happiness and scope for their creative forces, which gives them the possibility of building a world where there is no need to deceive, trick, plunder, and kill. The other day I read some wonderful words written by Korolenko: 'Man is born for happiness as a bird for flight.' That is a great truth! . . . What is happiness but creation, the joy that people give to one

another by their actions? That is the whole meaning of life. And fascism is the sterile creed of criminals, which means that it is dead at the heart and doomed."

"But how far will that corpse go?" I burst out. "Where do they get such strength?"

"This is a very difficult, deadly combat. But its outcome will not be decided by Hitler, for all his very considerable successes. The strength of the Soviet Union is inexhaustible, and you are right to believe in it, you were only wrong about the time it will take."

Kurtinets' big hand covered mine for a moment.

"The Soviet Union will be victorious, just as it has always been victorious, in everything. And that great victory will bring an end to the long misery in our region too. . . . But for the present it's war! The people's war! And let the enemy feel it, not only there at the front, but in our mountains as well. . . ."

With those words a light broke on me. I realized that his confidence, his clear thinking were the result not only of a strong, sure faith in victory, but of the part he himself was taking in bringing it closer.

"What ought I to do in this difficult time of trial, how can I help in the struggle?" This was my immediate thought, and I put it to Kurtinets. He showed no surprise at my question, he had evidently expected it.

"I've seen your experimental patches," he said after a long pause. "I saw the furrows by Lyuta and near Studenitsa. They're small, very far from what you dreamed of, but that's only for the present, in due time we shall see not tiny patches, but whole fields, free spacious fields without boundaries splitting them up. . . . I heard that you'd had a good deal of success in your experiments with meum."

"Yes, that's quite true," I said, surprised to find him so well informed.

Kurtinets smiled.

"I've even drunk milk from cows fed on your meum. Splendid milk!" he continued after a moment's thought. "That is your work, and you must keep it up."

I felt a keen sense of disappointment as I heard this.

"You didn't understand me," I said with chagrin. "Who needs my experiments, my trial plots, my observations now? I just can't keep on doing all that!"

"They're needed for the future," Kurtinets answered. "For the bright future which is approaching."

"And is that all you can find for me to do at a time like this?"

Kurtinets looked at me very hard but said nothing. The pause seemed a very long one.

"Who lives next door to you?" he asked me at last.

"On the right—my landlady and her two sons."

"What do the sons do?"

"One's volunteered for the army, and the other owns a restaurant."

"Are they Magyarons?"

"Yes."

"And on the left?"

"An old post-office official and his wife."

"I see." Kurtinets thought for a moment. "And is there any way of getting to your house without using the street?"

"Yes," I answered. "There's a hill-slope behind the house, and beyond that there are vineyards."

It was late. The moon was directly overhead, shedding a silvery light on the long, shiny leaves of the maize. Every now and then they rustled and gleamed in the light breeze from the Tisza.

"We need a place in Uzhgorod," Kurtinets said suddenly. "We lost the one we had a week ago. . . . The fact that you're in ill favour with the police is all the better for us. . . . It would never enter their heads that a man

who has to register every three days would dare do anything illegal. To them you're just a terrified, crushed little man, only afraid for your own skin."

"D'you know that for certain?" I asked.

"Yes. We know that's what they think of you. . . . So we'll follow the old saying—'If you want to hide something from thieves, put it in full view.' But—" Kurtinets paused and looked at me. "Well, are you ready to do what I ask?"

"Yes!"

"And . . . your wife?"

"My wife too," I answered unhesitatingly.

"Listen, then," said Kurtinets. "Within the next few days somebody will come to you and say: 'I want to rent a room for a month.' You must answer: 'Certainly, come in and see it.' You understand?"

"Yes."

"Repeat it, please."

"'I want to rent a room for a month.' . . . 'Certainly, come in and see it.'"

"Do everything that person says. That's all for the present."

At that moment I had an acute sense of hundreds of people around me, united by one organizing will, waging a resolute fight against the forces of evil. The thought that I was now with them, one of them, lifted my spirit in a fearless happiness, as it had on that distant sunny autumn day when I walked along the Mukachevo road listening to the measured tread of the hunger-marchers.

"How pleasant it is here . . . peaceful!" said Kurtinets, looking about him. "Listen how gently the leaves rustle! . . . You must be hungry, Comrade Belinets?"

"No, not very."

"Well, I could eat a whole bullock!"

Kurtinets rose and whistled twice. A minute later the soldier came up to us.

"Is there anything to eat in the saddle-bags?" Kurtinets asked.

"I might find something," the man answered.

"Bring it all along, then."

"The Muzhiev too?"

Kurtinets smiled.

"All right," he said. "This is a day for Muzhiev too."

Some minutes later a head of sheep's milk cheese, some maize-cakes and a bottle of Muzhiev wine were before us on a napkin. Kurtinets poured the wine into aluminium cups, raised his, and said: "There's a great many things we could drink to, things that mean a lot to us. But let's drink to the dearest of all, to the Soviet Union."

"To the Soviet Union!" I repeated.

Following Kurtinets' advice, I spent the rest of the night with Gevizi, and returned to Uzhgorod in the morning.

54

Shortly after my meeting with Kurtinets a slender, dark-haired woman in glasses, wearing a loose, shabby grey coat, rang our bell.

To anyone who might ask she was our friend, Maria Planchak of Chust, who had come to Uzhgorod to look for work as a dress-maker; in reality she was Anna Kurtinets.

She came to us on fixed days, always at the same time—just before dark. I waited for her in the greenhouse.

She would unbutton her coat unhurriedly. Under it she wore a big blue apron with white polka-dots. From beneath this apron she would take out a bundle tied up with string. Sometimes the bundle was heavy, sometimes it was quite light; I would conceal it at the bottom of a

box under a layer of soil bearing a healthy growth of alpine clover.

The bundles usually lay there for some days. There were two people who came for them—a lad who rather reminded me of Yurko, with a direct glance that seemed to challenge danger, and a middle-aged man in overalls, calm, thorough and something of a plodder—the kind who turns a thing over in his mind many times, but once his decision is taken, never goes back on it.

I could guess from many things that they were not Uzhgorod people, but came from somewhere a good way off. Where they took the bundles, however, I did not know, nor did I know what was in them.

By tacit agreement Ruzhana and I never talked about these people who came to us. We both knew only too well what awaited us in case of discovery. But we did what we were expected to do without a shadow of hesitation. It was the only thing that gave meaning to our lives. And never before had we been so dear to each other as now, when we no longer belonged to ourselves.

One day Anna came later than usual. She unbuttoned her coat with fingers stiff with the November cold, took out a bundle and handed it to me.

"Give this to the man who will come for it today," she said. "He's a railwayman and calls himself Pista. Tell him that it's for Verkhovina. Pista will leave you a small suit-case. Hide it away very carefully."

"All right, you needn't worry," I said.

After seeing Anna to the gate, I did not return to the green-house but went inside and started putting my notes in order. Remembering what Kurtinets had said, I forced myself to work.

A sudden noise out in the street attracted my attention. I laid down my pencil and listened. Somebody ran past the house, then there were whistles coming from different directions, as though signalling to each other.



Ruzhana came in with sleeping Ilko in her arms. Alarm was written on her face.

"Do you hear, Ivanko?" she asked. "I think they're chasing somebody."

At that moment a single shot sounded. As though in answer, more shots came from various sides. The firing accompanied by furious police whistles approached our house and passed it, dying away in the distance.

My hands grew numb and my heart thudded. There was a silence, but not for long. Again came the sound of footsteps, and somebody beat furiously at our door.

"Open up! It's the police! Open up at once!"

They searched the house, the garden, the green-house. The whole neighbourhood was cordoned off.

A policeman and police officer followed me into the green-house.

"Oho!" the officer cried in surprise. "It's just like spring in here!"

He marched down the narrow passageway, pushing boxes aside and peering under the broad shelf.

I forced myself not to look at the box where the alpine clover spread its green leaves. Like a bird that tries to draw the hunter away from the nest where its fledglings are hidden, I myself began moving other boxes about, showing the officer every corner.

He finished with the green-house and ordered me to follow him.

I asked permission to go into the house for my coat.

"No need," he rapped out. "It's not far."

He walked in front, lighting the path with his pocket-torch. I followed, the policeman behind me. We emerged into the street and turned towards a vineyard. It was foggy, and the narrow beam of light barely penetrated the fog. Then another light advanced to meet us and voices became audible. A policeman loomed up beside the officer.

"How's the lieutenant?" the latter asked.

"He's been taken away, sir. He's unconscious, a bullet got him in the stomach..."

We went several steps further to the group of police, who parted to make way for us. The officer turned to me. "Look at that."

Several circles of light glided over the clammy soil and united in a yellow patch on the prone, motionless body of a man. He was lying on his back, the left leg bent unnaturally under him, hands clutching at the lapels of a railwayman's overcoat. The glazed eyes of old Sandor Lobanyi stared up at me.

"Well?" snapped the officer.

I was shaken by the tragedy which had just taken place. But my mind worked clearly and quickly. It would be senseless, even disastrous, to say that I had never seen the old man; plenty of people could refute it.

"It's an old marble-cutter, sir," I said. "He used to live in this street."

"Where was he going?"

"I don't know, I haven't seen him for about a year."

"But he was on his way to somebody, wasn't he? He was taking that suit-case to somebody," cried the officer angrily, kicking some large object.

I peered through the uncertain light and saw a small plywood suit-case with the lid open by Lobanyi's feet. It was tightly packed with revolver cartridges.

"He must have been taking that to somebody," the officer repeated and cursed furiously.

The police brought a number of other people to the vineyard to identify the dead man, and all of them confirmed my words.

"Yes, he used to live in this street. But nobody's seen him for about a year."

From fragments of conversation among the policemen, I learned what had happened. They had held one of

their regular round-ups to check documents and Lobanyi had been caught in it. He had shown his papers, but when one of the men wanted to search him, Lobanyi knocked him down and ran up our street. Other policemen saw him and gave chase, Lobanyi firing as he ran. He got as far as the vineyards, but then a bullet cut him down.

Convinced at last that he could learn nothing more about the dead man, the officer ordered us all to go home.

Our district was cordoned off till morning, houses were searched, and police cars passed up and down.

Sandor Lobanyi was dead. For me this was the first bitter loss in the struggle which I, too, had now entered. "How many losses like that will still come?" I thought. "How many night alarms and dangers?"

We put the lights out and sat in my room clinging to each other, knowing that we might be parted at any moment, listening tensely to the noises outside, prepared for anything.

A week passed, everything quietened down, but nobody came. It was time for me to take the money to the wood-cutters, but the bundle for Verkhovina still lay buried in my box, and I did not know what to do with it. Whom was old Lobanyi to give it to? This worried me badly.

Early in the morning before going to the office I went into the green-house, resolutely removed the side of the box and drew the bundle from its hiding-place. I carefully unwrapped it on the shelf. It contained leaflets.

"The defeat of the German imperialists and their armies is inevitable. This is what Stalin said in Moscow on the sixth of November...."

My heart beating, I swiftly read it through, then returned to the beginning again.

"There can be no doubt that as a result of the four months of war Germany, whose reserves of man-power are already giving out, has been far more weakened than

the Soviet Union, whose reserves are only just beginning to come into full play."

"...The German fascist invaders are now on the brink of disaster."

The leaflet concluded with the appeal:

"People of Verkhovina, do not submit! The Communists call on you to fight against fascism, against the invaders! Make the roads through our mountains impassable for them, make our land their gravel!"

Moved and excited, I returned to the house and showed the leaflets to Ruzhana. She read one of them through carefully and looked at me questioningly.

"We'll have to wait, won't we?" she said uncertainly. "After all, somebody's sure to come for them..."

"And what if nobody comes for another week? You see what these leaflets are, how can they wait?"

Ruzhana shook her head.

"But what can you do with them?"

I hesitated a moment, then said decidedly: "I'll take them to Verkhovina myself."

Ruzhana sighed deeply.

"I'm afraid for you, Ivanko, terribly afraid..."

When I prepared to set off the next day, however, she herself helped me to hide the leaflets among the bills and other papers in my brief-case. As she kissed my cheek, she whispered: "Mother of God guard you, darling!"

I left those leaflets in the wood-cutters' huts, on village streets, at Volovets station and on the seats of the workmen's train. I did it all cautiously, keeping myself very inconspicuous, and more than once I saw people find these folded sheets, open them and then quickly slip them into their pockets.

It was a month before Anna Kurtinets came to us again. I told her what I had done with the leaflets intended for Sandor Lobanyi, and on her next visit with

more bundles she said: "Somebody'll come for four of them, and the other two, for Verkhovina, you take yourself. That's an assignment from the Committee."

From that time on, whenever I went to the wood-cutters or the raftsmen, I took with me packages of leaflets, hidden among the envelopes with money, and delivered them to the addresses given me.

55

The year was 1942.

Every morning the stationer still went up to the map in his shop window, carrying his brush and brown-stained bucket, and with a meticulous thoroughness blotted out more districts. Sometimes I felt a wild impulse to seize his arm and stop him—as though it was he who decided the events in that great land that lay stretching from east to west.

I saw him carefully draw his brush round a narrow light strip by the Volga, and thought despairingly that tomorrow that too would be gone.

The next day, however, the stationer did not appear at his usual time and the strip remained. . . . A week passed, a month. This narrow white strip standing out so clearly against the surrounding brown first caused agitation, then amazement and barely concealed delight.

"Are they still holding out?" whispered the men working with me, who knew I passed the map every day.

"Yes."

"It's amazing!"

It was about this time that my landlady's son came back from the army. When I had last seen him, he had been a tall, bull-necked fellow, extremely bellicose. He had gone with his cavalry platoon as far as that white strip by the Volga. He returned on crutches, with one leg mutilated and in tight bandages, and to all the ques-

tions of his family made one answer only: "To hell with the Germans!..."

The story of the map, however, did not end there. Some time later I again saw the fat stationer in the window with his brush and a tube of white paint. A crowd gathered round the shop. With carefully concealed impatience, people watched him paint a broad white wedge on the brown. A week later he brought—not a tube, but a whole bucket of white paint, and made such broad sweeps with his brush that a bewhiskered passer-by in a Hungarian jacket cried out angrily: "Gentlemen, look what he's doing!... And you stand here quietly watching!"

"Why should we start yelling?" a lanky chimney-sweep in a velvet cap standing in the crowd answered. "He's not the one that's doing it, it's those over there. What's the use of shouting once it's got to be painted white?"

The man with whiskers disappeared, and a few minutes later two policemen marched up to the shop. They made the stationer leave the window before he had time to finish his work, and a little later I saw him being taken down the street under guard. He was pale, blinked confusedly and stammered: "I haven't added a single millimetre, gentlemen. Not a single one.... Everything's exactly according to the Budapest communiqué. Please see for yourselves.... I'm always careful to be exact...."

The map had been removed, but nothing could conceal the fact that over the land marked on it light was spreading wider and wider, and very soon the great Battle of Stalingrad echoed all over our region too.

There were disturbances in the mountains.

At first it was only a rumour passed on in strict confidence and discussed in whispers, but soon it was talked

about almost openly. It reached Uzhgorod with amazing speed, bringing joy to some and alarm to others.

Whenever I went to Verkhovina, the wood-cutters, as well as old Fyodor Skripka and especially Semyon Rushchak, told me more good news—timber stacks burned down, a train taking soldiers to the front derailed by the tunnel of the Volovets Pass, here a gendarme post destroyed, there a company on the march fired upon. The gendarmes searched two weeks for men who had baled out from an aircraft, but never found them.

I saw Semyon Rushchak every time I made my rounds. I never hurried back to Uzhgorod after paying the men, but went on horseback or on foot to Fyodor Skripka's cottage. It was a long way, but that did not deter me.

Semyon came as soon as darkness fell, and we went together to the dairy-farm. Pcholka was no longer the only Carpathian cow to gladden my eyes—ten brown cows now stood in the stalls.

All this was thanks to Semyon's persistent efforts. No, it was not of Matlakh he thought, there was a searching, probing spirit within him that gave him no peace, and without which life would have been a dreary thing. I had never guessed before what an invaluable assistant I would find in Rushchak.

Semyon led me from stall to stall, told me all he had observed, and showed me the notes I had asked him to keep.

I still went secretly to the farm, but Semyon had no great fear of any nocturnal visit from Matlakh.

"He shuts himself up in the house now as soon as it gets dark, and doesn't show his nose again till morning," said Semyon. "He still goes roaring round in the day, but soon's evening comes everything's locked and bolted. And that house of his, Ivanko, it's like a fortress. He's got gendarmes there all the time, and dogs so savage he's scared of them himself."

All these changes had taken place after Matlakh's watchmen found one morning a sheet of paper pasted on the gate.

"Mind what you are doing, Petro," was written on it. "We order you, Pesigolovets, to draw in your horns and stop rampaging against the people. And if you don't obey, it will be the end of your house and you too. Death to fascists!"

Matlakh read it and foamed with rage.

"The sons-of-bitches! Giving *me* orders! Trying to scare *me*!"

He ordered to harness the horses and raced off to the district authorities.

"Just read that, what they writel" Matlakh roared at the gendarmery major and flung the crumpled sheet down on the table. "Who's got power in Verkhovina—us, or that Red rabble? I paid good money not to have it like under Beneš, but so there wouldn't be so much as a smell o' the Reds!"

The major tried to soothe Matlakh, said he would take steps, and promised that order would soon be established in the mountains once and for all.

Matlakh returned home somewhat calmed.

That night an out-building only just put up in his yard was burned to the ground, and again the watchmen found a sheet of paper on the gate with the words: "Don't go complaining!"

After that Matlakh made his house a fortress and took an armed body-guard with him wherever he went.

Punitive detachments were sent to Verkhovina one after another, but they could do nothing—on the contrary, the struggle flared more fiercely.

One day when Semyon was telling me what the People's Avengers were doing, he chanced to say:

"... And that Mikola of the Black Mountain—he's got the fascists in a fine stew!"

I jumped up.

"Who did you say?... Mikola of the Black Mountain?"

"Why, d'you know him?" Semyon gave me a searching look.

"No!"

"I don't, either."

"There used to be a fairy-tale about Mikola of the Black Mountain...."

"H'm!" Semyon laughed grimly. "They'd be mighty pleased for this Mikola to be just a fairy-tale." Then lowering his voice to a whisper, he continued: "I went myself to take a look at his work. There were cars lying by the road, near the pass, all burned out, a good many cars.... My wife scolded when I went. 'There'll be trouble to pay for it, you'll see!' she said, but I had to go, eh, he'd done the job properly!... But you're not listening," Semyon broke off, offended.

It was quite true—my thoughts were far away. Mikola of the Black Mountain!... Mikola!... Who but Gorulya could have taken that name? Who but the man that had made up the story about the locked earth? Could it really be Gorulya?

All the way back I thought of nothing else, sometimes glad, sometimes alarmed.

I awaited Anna's next visit with impatience. When she came she was carrying a basket slung over her shoulder with small, heavy packages carefully stacked among the heads of lettuce. They were exactly like those which had been in Sandor Lobanyi's suit-case.

I concealed the packages in a secret place and asked: "Mikola of the Black Mountain—who is he?"

Anna said nothing.

"Gorulya?"

"No."

"Olexa," I whispered.

Anna silently nodded.

One morning when I arrived at the office, the manager, alarmed by recent events, sent for me and announced:

"We're not going to risk having you carry money in the mountains any more. We've been lucky so far, but one of these days the Reds may be waiting for you. . . . I've decided to change the system of payment for the Verkhovina wood-cutters. They'll be paid once a month, and only in Svalyava, at the bank. So that leaves you the Tisza raftsmen. The valleys are safer."

This meant that my regular connection with Verkhovina was suddenly cut off. It was a blow, but I could do nothing about it.

Our region had ceased to be a quiet haven for the invaders. For a long time the newspapers were carefully silent about the partisans, but now they bristled with threats: "We are strong enough to enforce law and order!"

This, however, was easier said than done.

Troop-trains on their way to the front continued to be blown up, and battles were fought, first in one place, then in another, between the partisans and the soldiers sent against them. The communiqués of the Soviet Information Bureau which we listened to in secret, huddled round our radio sets, began to include reports of partisan warfare in our mountains.

I met Kurtinets again in February 1944, this time at my own home. I was doubly glad—first, to see this courageous man who meant so much to me, and secondly, because of the news he brought of Gorulya. Gorulya was in our district, not in the mountains, but in the area round Uzhgorod.

"Yes, he's here," Kurtinets repeated, shaking the snow off his Hungarian cloak. "He came back in the autumn. I won't tell you any more, so it's no use asking."

I was already accustomed to the iron law of secrecy which we all obeyed, and did not take offence.

"You're a herald of good news," I said, wringing his hand.

"I'd like to be that always," he said with a smile, "to the end of my life."

How could I guess that this end was so close!

The previous evening an old workman whom I knew as "Verny"¹ had come. After inquiring whether everything was all right, he told me that I would have a visitor the next morning, who would remain with me until evening.

"Don't lock your gate at night. If it's safe to enter, turn back the edge of the curtain in the window on the left. Tell your visitor that I'll be here at eight, as arranged."

In the morning, just as the tardy winter dawn was breaking, Kurtinets appeared. And although he spoke softly and I sensed caution in his every movement, I felt as though the house was full of people, gay and festive.

Kurtinets came into the room and began to warm his hands, slapping them gently on the glazed tiles of the hot stove. He refused to eat anything, asking only for black coffee. I went into the kitchen, and on my return found him sitting in an arm-chair, a small bird hopping about beside him, shaking its tail. It took me a moment to realize that it was a toy.

"It's well made," said Kurtinets, looking up at me. "The only thing it can't do is fly."

"Where's it from?"

"A long way off," he replied. "A radio-operator brought it back from over *there*! And I got it from him.... It's for your boy, give it to him."

"Won't you give it to him yourself?"

¹ "Verny" means "true."—*Tr.*

Kurtinets nodded, then thought a moment and said: "No, better not. It's better for him not to see me here. How old is he now?"

"Five."

"Five. . . . And mine are getting to be young men already. . . ."

"Do you see them?" I asked cautiously.

"I see them occasionally, but they don't see me," Kurtinets answered sadly. "It's got to be that way. . . . It's hard, of course, but for Anna it's harder still. They don't know we're here. They're living with some distant relations of hers, under another name. . . . Well, it looks as though it won't be much longer now."

He drank the black coffee with pleasure, wiped his lips with his handkerchief and began questioning me about sentiments among the townspeople.

What I had to tell evidently pleased him.

"It's excellent that the invaders and those that serve them are getting nervous. We've got to make them lose their heads altogether."

At eight in the morning Verny arrived carrying a bag of plumber's tools, and with him—Gorulya!

We rushed to embrace, forgetful of everything in our happiness—who we were, where we were and what was round us. It was an unexpected joy, such as comes but rarely in a lifetime.

"Quiet, don't make so much noise!" Verny urged, pacing round us in alarm. "Quiet, I tell you!"

But when Ruzhana came running out into the hall, Verny made a hopeless gesture and went to join Kurtinets, who was standing somewhat aside.

"Ivanko, Ivanko," Gorulya whispered, stroking my head as though I were a child again. "It's grand to see you!"

"If only you knew how glad I am," I said.

"I've been in these parts a long time," he said, assum-

ing a jestingly mysterious tone, and looking from me to Ruzhana. "I wanted to meet you, but it wasn't allowed. . . . Once I saw your wife in the street, but thank Heaven she didn't recognize me. . . . But where's my grandson? Where've you hidden him?"

"He's asleep," Ruzhana whispered.

"Can't I just take a peep at him?" Gorulya begged. "I won't wake him."

He tiptoed after Ruzhana into the room where Ilko was asleep. Kurtinets and Verna waited for him with me.

"Well, now let's take a look at you, Olexa," said Gorulya when he returned.

They hugged each other.

"Eh, but you've got older, friend, since the autumn!"

"You're not getting any younger yourself, Ilko!" Kurtinets said with a laugh.

"What d'you expect, with this life. . . ."

"Difficult?"

"It's difficult all right, but I'm not complaining, we do all we can. It's easier in the mountains, here in the Uzhgorod valley everything's in plain view!"

"I know that," said Kurtinets. "*What* you've done is all right, but we've got to talk about *what* you haven't done."

Gorulya frowned.

"And what's there you're not pleased with?"

"I want to hear about the People's Committees," said Kurtinets. "Have you got them in the Uzhgorod villages?"

"Yes," said Gorulya, still not understanding what Kurtinets was driving at. "Not so many of them, but some. You know how difficult it is to get them going here? But we did it, we brought in honest folks who can help us. Food, information—we got you all that through our committees. . . ."

"That's fine so far as it goes," Kurtinets interrupted. "We value the help they've given, but do the people of

the district know about these committees?... No, they don't. In fact they have no idea of their existence. But the people must know. The committees aren't just for the future, right here and now they must become the local underground organs of the people's power, and pit their strength against that of the occupation authorities. We've done a good deal along those lines already, and not only in Verkhovina as you're probably thinking, Ilko. Here's just one small example."

Kurtinets took a sheet of paper from his pocket, unfolded it and put it on the table in front of Verny.

I went up to look at this sheet covered with large, clear writing. It was crumpled and the torn edges bore traces of paste.

"It was up all day—in the centre of the village, right in front of the gendarmes, and they didn't dare to touch it," said Kurtinets. "Read it!"

Without waiting for us to do so, he picked up the sheet himself and read it aloud.

"Decision of the People's Committee of Vilki village, February 18, 1944. Number eleven...."

"No. 1. Comrades! The twenty-third of February is Red Army Day, the day of the army which is thrashing our mortal enemies at the fronts and bringing us freedom. The People's Committee declares this day a holiday in our village and calls on you to celebrate it in every cottage. Long live the Red Army!"

Kurtinets paused and cast us a sly glance.

"No. 2. The People's Committee has learned that workers will soon be recruited to go to Hungary. You will be told that it is for spring field-work. Do not believe it. Your hands are wanted for building fortifications. The People's Committee calls on you not to go, and to drive the agents out of the village.

"No. 3. The People's Committee has received a complaint that Fyodor Grinchak cheated his labourers and

underpaid them. The People's Committee orders the blood-sucker Fyodor Grinchak to give his labourers all that he kept back. If this is not done by the twenty-third, we shall try him with all rigour.

"This decision is to be displayed in the centre of the village from dawn to darkness. It is forbidden to tear it down. The elder, Petro Lyubka, and the chief of gendarmes, Laszlo Nagy, are made responsible for this.

"Victory to our struggle! Death to the fascist invaders!"

Kurtinets shook the paper at us.

"Do you understand what this means?"

"Power!" said Gorulya, his face glowing. "Was it up long?"

"From morning to night. The village elder and the gendarmes pretended not to notice it. You can imagine how they wanted to tear it down—but they didn't dare to touch it! And here round Uzhgorod you've kept yourselves so secret that you can't hear your own voices. Are you afraid of exposing people to danger? Then act cautiously, but act! To operate secretly means to act, not to sit with your hands folded."

Verny sat in silence, his eyes cast down. Gorulya, shamefaced, was rolling the leaflet in his hands.

"Where do you intend to meet?" asked Kurtinets.

Verny roused himself.

"We've a good place, not far from here, in the forest end of the town. A house with a garden, and quite near the woods."

"Who'll be there?"

"As it was arranged—representatives of the village committees," said Gorulya.

"And from my end—the comrades in town," Verny added.

"Will they go straight to the address?" Kurtinets inquired.

"No," said Gorulya. "The address hasn't been given to anybody. I'll meet each one separately in a café on the Corso."

Kurtinets smiled.

"I see you know your way about town, Ilko—maybe better than I do."

"Verny took me round," said Gorulya, embarrassed.

"So you work well together?"

"All right so far," said Gorulya. "He takes the town, I take the villages. . . . Eh, Olexa, if only you'd let me go to Verkhovina!"

Kurtinets shook his head.

"Don't ask me, friend, it's impossible! We need people here, we've very few. And in these parts you're a stranger, while there every tree-stump knows you!"

"I understand that," Gorulya sighed.

They began to speak of the people they were getting together, and I moved away not to be within hearing distance. Verny, I gathered, was giving Gorulya the names of the town comrades he was to meet in the café on the Corso. They spoke in whispers, but suddenly I heard Gorulya exclaim:

"Lukanich? Fyodor?"

"Do you know him?" Verny asked.

"Why, I too recall the name," Kurtinets interrupted them, "a professor of the Mukachevo school, I believe?"

"Used to be, but they've given him the sack. He was in prison, too; the Magyarons made him pay off old scores."

"What's he doing now?" Gorulya wanted to know.

"He is working in the office of a stone-cutting mill at Radvanka. For a long time he was trying to make contact with us. He's helped us out with information. Helped us out well."

"What can you tell us about him?" Kurtinets asked Gorulya.

"What can I tell you? Well, he was on our side, a long time ago, we fought shoulder to shoulder, then Masaryk became his idol."

"Yes," Verny confirmed Gorulya's words, "he told me about that. . . ."

"Then he spoke up for Ivanko at the school," Gorulya continued, "only we took different roads. And now it looks we're on the same road again."

They spoke a little while longer; then Kurtinets rose, and Verny and Gorulya did the same.

"Till evening, then, Comrades!"

"Good-bye till then!"

The blizzard died down towards evening, but the frost was severe. The stars shone brightly in the sky; everything was very silent. Uzhgorod seemed buried under the snow.

It was time for Kurtinets to go. I walked with him to the gate and stood listening to the snow crunching under his feet until he disappeared round the corner.

It was my custom to work for some hours in my greenhouse in the evenings, often remaining until late. There was plenty to do. I had been studying that scourge of our upland pastures—alpine sorrel. It grew in my wide boxes—tenacious, spreading stubbornly, choking the grasses sown with it. Making use of Fyodor Skripka's observations, I racked my brains to find a way of conquering this harmful weed.

When Kurtinets left me that February evening, I went to the greenhouse as usual. Absorbed in my work, I did not even notice that it was after midnight.

A vague sound attracted my attention—rather like the rustle of settling snow. Then something bumped against the glass side of the greenhouse. Silence. A moment later the vague sound came again, this time by the threshold.

I put out the light, went into the entry and cautiously

opened the door. A man was lying by the entrance. I quickly bent over him. It was Gorulya!

He was breathing unevenly, something gurgled in his throat and seemed about to burst out. I touched his shoulder. He opened his eyes and seized my arm in a convulsive clutch.

"Ivanko, listen, they've got Olexa..." he said hoarsely. "Pass it on. Ninety, Domaninskaya Street... The password is—'Where does the foreman live?' 'In the yard on the right.' They've got Olexa."

I went cold.

"Where did they get him?"

"Over there... On the forest side."

What I did after that was by instinct rather than by reason. I seized Gorulya under the shoulders and dragged him to the house, opened the door with my key and awakened Ruzhana. She turned pale when she saw the blood-stained figure on the passage floor.

"Ivanko, who's that?"

"Hush!" I ordered. "Give me a hand."

We got Gorulya on the sofa and took off his coat, jacket and shoes. I ripped open his shirt and found two bleeding wounds over the left breast.

Before an hour had passed, a doctor was working over the unconscious Gorulya. Ruzhana helped him and Anna Kurtinets sat pale and haggard on a chair. It was she who had opened the door to me in the house on Domaninskaya Street where I went as Gorulya had told me.

The doctor worked in silence, but I could see by his face that Gorulya's condition was grave.

As soon as he was bandaged, I invited the doctor into another room, closed the door, and said:

"We've got measles in the house. I hope you understand me, doctor?"

The doctor's lips moved, then he nodded and said: "I quite understand!"

He was clearly nervous and looked at me with a kind of wonder and caution, just as though we were strangers and not old acquaintances.

"We're trusting you, doctor, and you. . . ."

"You needn't worry!" he broke in hotly, and began angrily rolling down his shirt-sleeves.

He gave Ruzhana some instructions and left, saying how sorry he was that the wounded man could not be placed in hospital.

It was only on the third day that Gorulya recovered consciousness and we learned all that had happened in the forest end of the town.

Gorulya waited in a café on the Corso—a rowdy, third-rate place always full of customers. He had found a place at a table by the wall, not far from the door. A man coming there to meet him would sit down unnoticed. Gorulya would say a few words, the man would either drink a cup of coffee or pretend to have no time to wait, and go.

Lukanich did not at once know Gorulya in the smoke-haze of the café.

"You?" was all he was able to utter when he recognized him.

"This is unexpected, Pan Professor, isn't it?" Gorulya spoke softly. "Well, here we are again on the same road."

"Yes," Lukanich said, "life has parted us and life has brought us together again."

"I'm glad you've joined us again," Gorulya said in an undertone. "Remember the old times? . . ." Then, taking a look around, Gorulya rattled off quickly: "The meeting is not to be held; as soon as it is, you will be notified."

Gorulya could not say why he had not given Lukanich the address.

"I looked at him and the words came out by themselves."

"Good," Lukanich nodded, "I shall wait," and got up ponderously from the chair.

When Lukanich left, Gorulya waited for another fifteen minutes or so, then paid and calmly walked out of the café.

Although there was no moon, the snow which had fallen during the day made the almost deserted street fairly light. Gorulya decided to walk round a few of the central blocks before turning off to the forest end of the town. He chose the quietest, emptiest streets, and in one of these, leading into Koryatovich Square, he fancied that someone was following him. He glanced quickly round and saw a man some distance off. To make sure, he dropped a glove and stopped suddenly to pick it up. The man behind stopped too—only for an instant, but it was enough for Gorulya. A man going about his own business will not check his pace just because somebody in front has happened to stop.

"Shadowing me," thought Gorulya, and his heart sank.

Working illegally as he was, Gorulya had had to study all the ins and outs of Uzhgorod. Verny, who headed the work in the town, had helped him. He was familiar with convenient passageways, labyrinths of alleys that many old residents did not even know existed, and yards which he could cut through to another street. One of these was close by. He had only to enter it, climb a low wall, and he would have a way through.

Gorulya quickened his steps, nearly knocking down a passer-by, apologized and dived into the entry of a large house. A door beneath the staircase led him into the yard, to the wall. He swung quickly over it and concealed himself behind some sheds.

For two or three minutes it was silent, then the door creaked, snow crunched, and two men halted by the wall.

"There you are!" said one of them. "He got over

here. See the tracks? Come round the back, we may be in time."

"I can't go fast," said the other. "I'm short of breath."

"But you're quite sure it was he?"

"Of course it was!"

"Mother of God, that's Lukanich!" Gorulya thought. The voice of the other man also seemed familiar to him, but he could not at the moment recall to whom it belonged. Only after the men were gone it came back to him: "Szabo!"

It would now be dangerous to go out into the neighbouring street. Gorulya waited a little while, then climbed back over the wall, crossed the yard, entered the house and stopped in the entry, peering out into the square. Not a soul! He skirted it, crossed the Corso to the Uzh embankment and then made his way by a circuitous route, glancing around every other minute, to the wooden house on the forest side. The house stood in a large orchard, some little distance from other buildings. A low wattle fence surrounded the orchard, in some places almost buried in snow-drifts. The road to the forest ran about three hundred yards to the right; on the left was a narrow belt of vineyards and beyond that a big piece of waste-land falling in a steep slope to the back-yards of Uzhgorod's outskirts.

A sentry emerged from behind a tree, hailed Gorulya softly, received the password and concealed himself again.

The door was opened by a young Hungarian woman, the mistress of the house. Gorulya went with her along a darkened passage, then stopped and stared at her in astonishment. He could hear singing coming from somewhere in the house—a number of men's voices chanting softly, in harmony.

Catching his glance, the woman smiled.

"Yes, they're singing," she said in Hungarian. "But you needn't worry, it can't be heard outside."

Gorulya went to the door through which the voices sounded, opened it carefully and looked into the room.

It was large and sparsely furnished. The light from a low-hanging lamp barely penetrated the clouds of tobacco-smoke. A number of men were sitting on a sofa by the hot stove, their eyes half closed as they quietly sang the chorus of an old song—a shepherd's humorous complaint because he could not choose a sweetheart. The verses were sung by Kurtinets. He sat in the middle of the room, his arms resting on the back of a chair, giving the signal with a wide sweep of his arm for the chorus to join in.

It was as though these men were challenging the alarms and dangers which surrounded them at every step; their faces seemed to say: "It's not the song itself that gives us joy, we are glad because we have gathered and are singing together, and even when we part we shall still be together."

Their mood communicated itself to Gorulya. A warm glow filled him as he entered the room, and his recent fears were forgotten.

"Why are you so late?" asked Kurtinets, coming up to him with Verny.

"I was shadowed," said Gorulya sullenly and told them what had happened.

Verny listened glumly.

"We've been trying to get at Boros for a long time," he said. "The blood of far too many of our comrades is on his hands. . . . This earth is too good for him. As to Lukanich . . . well, if I didn't have it from you, I wouldn't believe it."

A shadow of anxiety flickered in Kurtinets' eyes.

"You're sure you did get rid of them?" he asked uneasily.

"I am sure of it—after roving about some."

"We'll put the sentries further away from the house, and we'd better lose no time," ordered Kurtinets.

Verny went to carry out the order.

A few minutes later he returned and whispered to Kurtinets that all was done.

"Well," said Kurtinets, looking at his watch. "Time to start."

The men at the table moved up to make room for him, but instead of sitting down, he stood leaning against the stove, his hands behind him, and simply and quietly, as though thinking aloud, he told them about the latest communiqués from the front, how the partisan movement was growing and what the underground groups and the People's Committees should do in the new situation.

An alarm signal cut him short. The same moment the door was flung open, and the mistress of the house ran in, crying: "Soldiers!"

"Where are they?" Kurtinets asked quickly.

"Everywhere—on the road, by the orchard, in the vineyards!"

Everybody jumped up.

"Take off your shirts and put them on over your jackets. Quick!" said Kurtinets. "All got guns?"

"Yes." And the men rapidly followed Kurtinets' instructions.

A sentry ran into the room panting, and in jerky phrases said that the soldiers had come in seven cars, surrounded the place and were closing in.

"Much space between them?" asked Kurtinets.

"About sixteen yards so far."

"Leave the house two at a time," said Kurtinets. "Don't crowd at the door, and get to the fence as quick as you can. Lie down at various places and wait till the soldiers come close, then at a signal shot break through. Don't keep bullets for yourselves, every one's for the enemy, and if anything happens to you . . . don't give our children cause to be ashamed of us."

Verny and the sentry were to leave first. Before letting them out, Gorulya whispered to Verny: "Remember Fyodor Lukanich and Szabo. If but one of us remains alive, let him bring to judgement these Pesigolovets men. Well, off with you!" He flung the door open.

Verny and the sentry jumped down from the porch, flattened out in the snow and seemed to melt into it. The white shirts made them almost invisible.

Kurtinets and Gorulya followed, then came the others.

The snow was very deep. The soldiers advanced slowly to the orchard where Kurtinets and Gorulya crouched hidden behind the fence. Everything was so quiet that Gorulya could hear his watch ticking in the pocket under his coat.

At last the line of soldiers reached the orchard. They shook the fence, and the one nearest to Kurtinets was swinging up a long leg to get over, when Kurtinets rose and fired point-blank. Almost in the same instant shots sounded from all parts of the orchard.

Stumbling through the snow, firing as they went, Kurtinets and Gorulya made for the waste-land and the town. The soldiers following them frequently had to fire at random, for the white shirts blended with the snow and the pursuers often lost sight of them. The dark figures of the soldiers, however, stood out distinctly, and every now and then one of them gave a cry and fell.

"The others seem to be getting away, Ilkol" said Kurtinets hopefully, listening to the distant firing.

"Looks like it," Gorulya answered.

Only fifty paces remained to the slope when Gorulya staggered and fell, clutching at the air. Kurtinets ran to him and tried to raise him, but Gorulya could not stand. Chills shot through his body, but his chest seemed to be on fire.

"Where did it get you?" whispered Kurtinets, kneeling beside him.

"Get away," Gorulya groaned. "For God's sake get away, quick. . . ."

For a fraction of a second Kurtinets hesitated, then rose and ran. The soldiers gave a shout and made after him, ploughing through the snow.

Gorulya saw Kurtinets run a good distance, spring over the edge of the slope, roll down it, and rise almost beside the yards. He saw several dark figures leap out of those yards, and then there was a cluster of fighting figures in the snow.

Gorulya struggled to rise as though it were he who was attacked, but fell back with a groan. He saw the soldiers coming back up the slope, pushing Kurtinets before them with their guns. He climbed silently, but on the waste-land he stopped for a moment, and it seemed to Gorulya that he stretched himself to his full length as he began to sing:

*Verkhovina, our land so dear,
How beautiful is all I see! . . .*

As he walked surrounded by the soldiers, he sang. Gradually his voice grew fainter, but for a long time Gorulya could hear it.

56

Gorulya lay in our house for a week. These were the most difficult, anxious days Ruzhana and I had yet experienced. We could not sleep, all night we listened for sounds from outside. A gate would close somewhere and we started, thinking it was ours.

Gorulya was sometimes better, sometimes worse, but the thought of Kurtinets never left him for a moment. He suffered intensely.

"Olexa, Olexa," he whispered desperately, gritting his teeth. "Olexa."

When he felt a little better, I tried to distract him from the thoughts that tormented him by asking about the Soviet Union. He could not talk for long, he soon tired, but he became more cheerful telling us about that land, and there even appeared a faint smile on his face.

Gorulya had lived in Kharkov. He had worked as carpenter on the construction of a big factory and studied in the evening.

"When I said I wanted to study, Ivanko, I thought they'd laugh at me—an old man wanting to go to school. But they didn't! Everybody studies there, the whole country. They build and they study. . . . Eh, Ivan, I only want everybody in the world to have the good life they had there before the war, everybody in the world! . . ."

By the end of the week Gorulya was a little stronger, and was taken away to the mountains.

In the middle of the day two sledges loaded with wood came into our yard. They were emptied, then straw and sheepskins were spread on the bottom of one, and at dusk, unnoticed, two sturdy drivers carried Gorulya out rolled up in sacking, laid him on the sledge, heaped straw over him and drove calmly off.

Rumours about the shooting by the forest spread through the town. Nobody knew exactly what had happened, and on this occasion the fascist newspapers which seized so eagerly on every sensation were silent. One day, however, the screaming head-lines about the impregnable "Arpad Line,"¹ about Hitler's new secret weapon which was to bring a turning point in the war were augmented by a new one: "Resolute Action Crowned with Success. Mikola of the Black Mountain Caught!"

¹ Line of defence along the Carpathian Mountains.—*Ed.*

The city fathers paid a call to police headquarters, bringing gifts "from the grateful Ruthenian¹ people," finding protection under the crown of St. Stephen, to be presented to the officials who had distinguished themselves by this great feat.

"They're in too big a hurry with their rejoicings," said Anna, and her eyes blazed feverishly.

I sometimes felt that Anna, like Ruzhana and I, still could not quite realize that Olexa was in the enemy's hands. But I was wrong.

"I know they're torturing him," she said, "they may kill him; it's no good deceiving ourselves. . . ."

Her voice trembled and broke, and we knew that every minute of the day and night this fragile, devoted woman was there, with Olexa.

In our parts orchards blossom in April. Uzhgorod looks from a distance as though a white cloud had sunk over it and dispersed in fragments entangled round the houses and clinging to them. Sometimes a gust of wind sweeps down and you glance out of the window and say: "Why, it's snowing!" But it is not snow, it is millions of petals from the cherry-trees—filling the air and covering the ground with a carpet of pure white.

The days are hot and sultry, waiting for the first thunder-storms.

On one of those April days Anna came at her usual time. I opened the door to her. She looked at me with unseeing eyes, walked slowly, blindly into the room, sank down on a chair, and said: "Olexa is dead. . . . They've killed Olexa. . . ."

¹ The name given to Sub-Carpathian Ukrainians by Hungarian bourgeois historians.—*Ed.*

Ruzhana burst into tears. Anna looked at her, then covered her face with her hands and wept quietly, almost silently, like old women in Verkhovina who have learned to restrain their grief.

Olexa was dead. They had killed Olexa. The sorrow was too great to absorb at once, to find words which could bring comfort. And what words could there be?

I went up to Anna and put my arm round her shoulders. She grew calmer, removed her hands from her face and sat for a little while staring fixedly before her with burning eyes. Then she picked up the basket woven of maize-leaves which she had brought, took out three small bundles and laid them on the table.

"Somebody'll come for two of them," she said. "The third's for you."

I unfastened one of the bundles and picked up the top sheet. I hastily let my eyes run down the first few lines and started. I seemed to hear Kurtinets' living voice. It was the letter he had written before he was executed. A warder at the Budapest prison—we learned later that he had connections with an underground group of Hungarian patriots—had brought it out and it had come to us.

"This is a letter to all who have fought together with me," Kurtinets wrote, "and to you, Anna, and you, my boys. . . .

"Today is the last day of my life. It is hard for a man who loves life as I do to accept the thought, yet it is true. The last day. . . .

"I was to have been executed two weeks ago, immediately after the sentence, but the old wound on my arm opened, and they put me in the hospital, so as to place the noose on a sound, healthy man—this was part of the torture.

"But my last week in the hospital was a week of hope. People whose names I cannot at this time reveal told me

that a group of Hungarian comrades operating in Budapest intended to make an attempt to rescue me when I was taken from the hospital back to prison. Last night as the van was going through the town two tires burst one after the other. The van stopped. I heard firing and the shouts of the guards. The three sitting in the van with me smashed the grated window and began to shoot, but the rescuers were afraid to fire into the van. That was their mistake. The delay, short as it was, was fatal, and I was saved for the executioner. But be that as it may, I am grateful to our Hungarian friends if only for the fact that I heard their voices so near.

"It is now early morning. The prison is still asleep. Outside it is April. My eyes pierce the thick prison walls and I see it—spring-time on my Carpathian land for whose happiness I have lived and give up my life today. You need have no doubts, Comrades, I shall meet death with my head high, to my last breath true to the Party whose soldier I am happy to be. I owe it to the Party that I can say—yes, my life has not been lived in vain. And if my heart feels a pang at the final moment, it will only be because it is after all a human heart.

"Anna, my darling! Thank you for your love which has made the hardest hours of my life easier, and we have had many of them. Thank you for your loyal friendship and for our dear boys. I know that you will bring them up honest, courageous and true, and do not scold them too much if they are naughty—they are only children after all.

"Do not weep for me, Comrades! We weep for the dead, but I want to be alive with you. Fight with all the strength in you for a happy life on earth, a life worthy of human beings!

"I embrace you, Comrades, and bid you farewell!

"Mikola of the Black Mountain—*Olexa Kurtinets.*"

Like a wind it swept the land from Uzhgorod to Rakhov. Hundreds of people left the villages, the towns, the farm-steads, and made their way to partisan outposts: "For Mikola!"

In Uzhgorod the underground People's Committee tried Lukanich and Szabo.

Lukanich was roused at his flat in the middle of the night, and Szabo was taken from one of the rooms of a brothel which of late he had been frequenting.

Both were brought to a cottage in the outskirts of Uzhgorod.

A number of men sat at a table in a room lighted by an oil-lamp, among them Verny, one of the five who had escaped the soldiers and police on the night of the round-up at the forest end of the town, and myself.

Upon learning that they were brought to face trial, Lukanich cried angrily in a hoarse voice: "You dare not kill me, do you hear? You dare not!"

"We are not here to kill," Verny replied. "We are here to try you."

Szabo seemed at first stricken dumb, and he shrivelled up, let out a snarl, but then suddenly burst into pleading: "Don't take my life . . . I'll tell you everything!"

Without waiting for an answer, stumbling in his haste, and casting an occasional apprehensive glance at Lukanich, who kept grimly silent, he told the judges how he came to be on the police, and how, when he learned that operations were to be launched against the underground People's Committees, he volunteered to take part in them.

"Why?" asked Verny.

"Mine was a dull job, sir, it shattered my nerves."

"Who brought you in contact with Lukanich?"

Szabo hesitated.

"The police?"

"No."

"Then who? The Soldier of Christ?"

Szabo shuddered and drew his head down between his shoulders.

"Yes."

"You dastardly coward!" Lukanich shouted at him.

Szabo recoiled to the wall and seemed glued to it.

"When did you become an agent of the Soldier of Christ?" I asked Szabo.

"When Matlakh fired me."

"What about Lukanich?"

"I don't know, but it was a long time ago anyway."

Later Szabo told how, along with two police agents, he was posted a short distance from the café on the Corso, how Lukanich joined them, and how at first Gorulya evaded them, but later they fell on his trail.

Lukanich answered none of our questions. He stood resentfully silent throughout the trial, his eyes hidden under frowning brows. Only when he heard the sentence did he snarl and fling himself at the table in a paroxysm of savage, frenzied hatred....

In the name of the people, the committee sentenced Lukanich and Szabo to death. That night the sentence, typed in a number of copies, was pasted up in Uzhgorod, and in the morning the police found the bodies of Lukanich and Szabo by the stables of the gendarmery.

One day towards the end of the month the manager sent me to Verkhovina, to Volovets, to check the bills for unloading timber. I was glad to go, hoping for a chance to see Rushchak. When I arrived, however, I heard that there were gendarmes along the road to Studenitsa, letting nobody through. The station, too, was full of gendarmes and soldiers. Even here, in Volovets, in broad daylight, they went about only in threes.

Disappointed, I decided to check the accounts quickly and return to Uzhgorod with the train that had brought me. The job finished, I got into the coach and waited for the train to start. Ten minutes passed, twenty, thirty, and it showed no sign of moving. I left the coach to find out the reason. Nobody seemed able to tell me anything until I met a conductor whom I knew.

"We'll be here some time yet, sir," he whispered, choosing a moment when we were alone by the coach. "There's something wrong along the line." Then with a very significant wink he added: "Mikola of the Black Mountain's making hay of the time-table."

I pricked up my ears.

"Who? Who did you say?"

"I said 'Mikola of the Black Mountain.' Haven't you ever heard of him?"

"Of course I have, but ... he's not there any more. He's dead."

"That's as may be." The conductor brought his mouth close to my ear. "I guess they wish he wasn't there, but he is."

The conductor jerked his head towards the platform, and I saw a group of people round a notice-board which I had not seen before. I strolled up. About a dozen woodcutters, villagers and railwaymen were listening to some literate person reading out the notice. It was a conspicuous sheet, yellow, with green stripes and many exclamation marks, pasted over an old Bât'a advertisement.

"Thirty *ugres* of land to anyone who informs the authorities of the whereabouts of Mikola of the Black Mountain!

"Five *ugres* to anyone who discloses the real name of the bandit!

"Show your loyalty to Hungary!"

People listened, said nothing, moved away and others drifted up to listen silently in their turn. Only one young,

red-cheeked fellow in an ill-fitting town suit said in something between delight and envy: "That's a lot of land! You could do well on it!"

There were sombre looks cast in his direction.

"You watch out," said a railwayman grimly, "watch out that you don't get yourself three paces of land!"

"And that would be too much," another added.

I returned to the coach and took my seat by the window again.

"This is a queer business," a villager with a saw wrapped in sacking, who sat behind me, said wondering. "They executed a man in Budapest and now they're looking for him!"

"They didn't execute him at all," the man next to him answered. "They couldn't. I've heard tell when they came for him in the morning, he wasn't there!"

We waited at the station for a long time, until darkness.

Some miles out of Volovets the train slowed down. Two gendarmes entered the coach, took their places by the doors and ordered: "Backs to the windows! Quick!"

I noticed that it had become lighter, and in a few more minutes the red glow of flames shone on the walls of the coach and people's faces. Something was burning on either side of the railway.

"Isn't it light!" someone murmured behind me.

"Aye, and it's going to be lighter yet!" another echoed. "The real light's still to come!"

In the autumn of 1944 we saw the dawning of that light.

One day, at the beginning of September, Anna Kurtinets arrived excited and happy. Almost before she was inside the room she cried:

"There's an uprising in Slovakia, Ivan.... Baňska Bystrica's in the hands of the insurgents, and Tiso's units are going over to the people...."

I seized her hand in a hard grip, then made her sit down and showered her with questions.

"I don't know any details," she said. "But the people have risen! You know what that means?"

The uprising in neighbouring Slovakia, ravaged by Hlinka's¹ fascist thugs, spread day by day, sweeping all the central part of the country. It was an outburst of popular indignation, so strong that the invaders in our district began hastily sending their families into Hungary, and Anna Kurtinets told me to give instructions to all my contacts in the Tisza region to be ready for action.

Not only the invaders themselves and their hangers-on were alarmed, but also those who, sensing Hitler's inevitable downfall, began to trim their sails accordingly. Our old acquaintance Matlakh was one of them.

Long before the Soviet Army came to the Carpathian foot-hills, rich farmers, cattle-traders and even local officials who had served the invaders began visiting Matlakh. They pretended that they just happened to be passing through Studenitsa. Why not look in on an old friend? Actually, however, they were all brought by the same alarm. As a dog scents a death in the house, they felt that the end of Hitler and his allies was near, and lay awake at nights in fear of what would happen to them.

Matlakh they hated, envying his success, and in secret always longed for him to break his neck, but at this anxious juncture they bowed to his cleverness, his astuteness, his far-sightedness, and came in the hope of learning something useful from him or guessing what Matlakh himself intended to do when disaster fell. But Matlakh gave nothing away.

"Eh, neighbour," he would say with a sigh. "Maybe I might have thought of something if I weren't so ill.

¹ Leader of the fascists in Slovakia.—*Ed.*

I'm a sick man, neighbour, that's all I can think of, and the rest—let it go . . . let God's will be done."

He was, however, secretly buying up dollars through trusted agents on the black market in Uzhgorod, Mukachevo and even Budapest, taking every precaution. He had been doing this ever since alarm over the Nazis' retreat had sent him for advice to his old counsellor Father Novak in Uzhgorod.

After Voloshin's "state" came to the end of its inglorious existence, Novak had ostensibly dropped politics and devoted himself entirely to the service of God; in reality, however, the Spiritual Father had been recommended by the Vatican to the Americans, and became their agent in Uzhgorod. Couriers who came from Rome brought him secret instructions and took back the information he collected for American Intelligence. Serving the Americans did not prevent Novak from being quite sincere in his worship of Hitler and Horthy.

The priest trusted Matlakh—but not so far as to disclose his real manner of life. Matlakh could make a pretty good guess, but had so far said nothing about his suspicions even to Novak himself. This time, however, when he found himself alone with the priest in the large room with its time-darkened pictures on the walls, he asked: "Who d'you expect to get help from now, Father?"

"I place my faith in God on high," Novak replied.

"What about someone a little closer?" Matlakh looked at the priest very hard.

"I don't understand what you mean," said Novak coolly, meeting Matlakh's stare.

"What's there to understand!" the other retorted, coming straight to the point as usual. "It's not been just empty talk when you've asked me about level pastures high up in the mountains, and about army barracks, and...."

"Pan Matlakh," Novak broke in sternly, "what do you want?"

"I want to know, Spiritual Father, which horse to back now?"

The conversation was a short one, but after it Matlakh seemed to come to life again and, with all his native energy and caution, started buying dollars.

"With this kind o' money we'll get through anywhere," he told his wife and son. "God himself has put it over all the rest."

"But what if the Russians come?" his wife asked fearfully.

"They won't. All Europe'll be under the Americans, and they won't let the Russians go beyond the Carpathians."

"The Mother of God grant it," sighed the woman, crossing herself. "If only the Americans let you alone, Petro."

"You're a fool, woman!" Matlakh snorted. "They'll help me. We're in the same cart, we sing the same song."

It was hardly likely that Matlakh had ever before taken an interest in geography, but now he bought a huge map of Europe in Mukachevo, hung it in his bedroom, worked out the scales and every day measured the distance from the Carpathians to the Soviet front and to the advanced positions of the American army in the west.

"Mother of God," he whispered, "spur my horse. . ."

When news came of the uprising in Slovakia, Matlakh was badly alarmed and hastened to Father Novak in Uzhgorod.

Reports of the insurgents' continued success passed from mouth to mouth. I saw how difficult it was for the people in the villages, the trains, in Uzhgorod itself to conceal their joy and hope. The raftsmen on the Tisza kept their axes and long hooked poles by them wherever they went, as though waiting for a signal.

Hitler's generals, seeing the danger menacing their army in the rear, sent picked divisions to the liberated districts of Slovakia. Fierce fighting started. A Soviet partisan column broke through the front-line and went to the aid of the insurgents, and units of the Czechoslovak Corps formed in the Soviet Union were brought over on aircraft. We were certain that the insurgents would be victorious, but instead they suddenly began to suffer one defeat after another. There were vague rumours of treachery, and Matlakh returned to Studenitsa in high spirits.

"Well, old woman, the trouble's over!" he told his wife. "It's my idea the Germans would never ha' got the Slovaks down if America hadn't wanted it.... And so men were found to open the gate from the inside."

It was only much later, in our own day, at Rudolf Slansky's trial in democratic Prague, that we discovered who had betrayed the Slovak uprising, who had "opened the gate from the inside" to the enemies of the people.

For a long time, however, battles still continued in Slovakia. The people had risen and they fought with furious heroism. It was in one of these battles that František Stupa—lawyer, novelist and fighter—died a hero's death.

The uprising was defeated. But one October night I saw again rays of hope coming to our land from the east.

The lights were out in the house. Ilko was asleep. Ruzhana and I stood by the window watching the throbbing glow of distant battles, listening to the faint vibration of the window-pane.

"Is it at the pass?" asked Ruzhana, drawing her shawl closer round her.

"No, it's not got there yet.... Why are you trembling?"

"I can't really believe that it's so near now..."

But lights continued to flare on the horizon, illuminating the mountain tops, and there was that tense, eagerly expectant feeling with which one awaits the longed-for thunder-storm in a time of drought.

58

I have never known such a lovely October as we had in that memorable year of 1944. Clear, dry, warm days followed one after the other. The sky was so blue that it almost hurt the eyes to look at it. The sun was as warm as in summer, and only the coppery hues of the forest and the crystal clearness of the air reminded one that autumn had come.

Nobody, however, seemed to notice the beauty of the season. All were stirred and excited by the irresistible march of events, events that some awaited with joy, barely containing their impatience, others with fear, still others with apprehensive curiosity.

The town was full of shabby soldiers, and travellers with suit-cases and knapsacks come from God knows where. The authorities ordered all archives to be burned, and fragments of black ash circled and swirled over the town like swarms of flies.

My landlady's sons, fanatical Magyarons, who with the arrival of the Hungarians had changed their Slavic name of Chernichka to the Hungarian Cserneký, kept dropping significant hints about some battle in the offing, some turning point, and swore that Uzhgorod would never be surrendered no matter what happened. We knew, however, that they were secretly packing their belongings.

The underground committee instructed me to learn what property of the people the invaders intended to take

away to the west, and from where. Cautiously, to avoid rousing suspicion, I found it out through various acquaintances and mainly through the omniscient Chonka.

Meeting me in the street one day, Chonka said mysteriously: "Can you guess who was in our bank yesterday?"

He never had sufficient patience really to keep his hearer in suspense, and this time was no exception.

"Matlakh!" he burst out, without even giving me a chance to make my guess. "Just imagine, I came out into the corridor and there he was, wheeling himself along in his chair, straight to the manager's office. Someone told me afterwards, as a dead secret, that he means to drive all the cattle away from his farms, and then make off himself."

"Where does he want to drive them?"

"Not eastward, be sure of that! Somewhere further off!" And Chonka waved his hand vaguely.

My thoughts worked quickly. So that was it! Matlakh wanted to take the cattle bred by Semyon and Kalinka, fed on my grasses, pastured on land taken from poor men like Fyodor Skripka. . . .

"When's he taking them? You understand that we can't let him do it?"

"But who can stop him?" Chonka shrugged his shoulders.

"I've got to go to Studenitsa and warn the people there."

Chonka shook his head.

"You won't get to Studenitsa, Ivan. All traffic along the roads goes one way only—this direction."

"I'll get there somehow!"

Chonka stood in silence, staring at the floor. Then he raised his large eyes—somewhat dull as usual, but with a certain spark reminiscent of other days, something boyishly mischievous.

"Take me with you, Ivanko," he said. "It's hard by oneself, but two of us—we'll get anywhere, even to the end of the world!"

"Why do you want to go?" I asked in surprise.

"Why do *you*?" Chonka whispered. "Don't you trust me? I can get a car. Want an army car?... I know a supply officer. We'll get through easily on that."

"Wait a bit," I interrupted. "What about the bank?"

"They won't bother about me," said Chonka with a wave of the hand. "They've all lost their heads anyway...."

What was stirring in Chonka? Was it a flash of his boyish love of adventure, or was it the urge to do something useful at last, useful for the people?

"When can you get the car?" I asked.

"Any time, now if you want," he answered eagerly, and his eyes sparkled.

"But what'll you tell them at home?"

Chonka frowned.

"What men always tell their wives: 'I've got to go away on business, my dear.'"

Without losing another moment, we went to the barracks where Chonka intended to ask the supply officer for a car.

Even in those hectic days, to walk through the town with Chonka was sheer torment. Everybody knew him, he knew everybody. He had been at school with one, worked with another, played billiards with a third, had a vineyard alongside that of a fourth, and if the fifth happened to be a stranger, he nevertheless felt he had to bow courteously and even stop.

"We've got to think up a reason for going," I observed when we approached the barracks at last.

"Personal, or official?"

"For the road, official—for instance, we can say we're going to check the forest inventory."

"No good!" said Chonka. "Who'd be going to check any inventories at a time like this!"

"On the contrary, it's very good!" I insisted. "Can't you see how that'll strike a soldier? Everything falling to pieces there, and here the authorities are quite calm. Well, and for your officer—we're going to Studenitsa to get our relations out."

"That's not bad," Chonka said. "Relations—that's all right!"

At the barracks we agreed that I should wait in a little shop opposite. Chonka turned into the gateway, but found his way blocked by a sentry. Standing in the shop doorway, I saw Chonka explaining something to the man, and then to the officer on duty. At last he was let in and marched to the long grey building at the back of the grounds.

The shop was dark and smelt of stale goods; I ordered a bottle of soda-water and waited for Chonka with what patience I could summon.

He did not come back for a long time. It evidently was not an easy matter to get a car at a time like that.

The shopkeeper was a short stout man with somewhat foolish, yet fine eyes. He stood leaning against the counter, sighing from time to time. His face seemed somehow familiar, but I could not place him. Suddenly it came to me.

"Have you been trading here long?" I asked.

"A little over a year," he said in something between confusion and alarm.

"I think I've seen you somewhere else."

"Yes," he sighed. "I used to have a shop for toys and stationery in the centre of town, but I had a misfortune, a great misfortune. . . ."

"I know," I interrupted. "It was because of that map of the front."

He started and paled.

"How do you know?"

"I saw the police take you away."

"Yes, yes, yes," he chattered nervously. "And I—I kept it strictly according to the army communiqués, and they held me in prison for it six months. . . . But what's going to happen now? Everything's falling to pieces!"

Just then I saw a camouflaged car come out of the barrack gate, driven by a man in Hungarian uniform. Chonka, sitting beside the driver, waved his hand to me.

I paid for my soda-water and hurried out.

59

We warned Ruzhana and Julia, then left Uzhgorod by the Perechin road.

It was packed with German and Hungarian soldiers, army lorries and civilian conveyances, all pouring in to Uzhgorod. A priest rode in his carriage next to a self-propelled gun. Two women, hugging suit-cases, perched in an army lorry. A stout bewhiskered man trudged along on foot, a suit-case on his shoulder. My imagination took me back to 1941; I could see them all—the German officer, his face grey with dust, the bewhiskered man, the women—rushing greedily eastward, to Russia. One sought military fame and a general's epaulettes, another dreamed of an estate, a third was simply out for anything he could get, spurning nothing that might come his way. Where would all this scum be washed up now?

Our car advanced with difficulty, hooting, stopping and starting again. The traffic was all in the opposite direction, drivers and pedestrians gave way unwillingly, swearing, threatening to push us into the ditch. At a cross-roads an officer dashed up to our car and ordered us to get off the road, swearing in two languages at once.

"Get back!" he yelled, pulling a revolver out of his

holster. "Turn that sardine-tin of yours and get back at once!"

But Chonka! . . . I was thunderstruck by his composure and air of authority.

"Hold your tongue!" he snapped in German.

The officer, accustomed to seeing civilians tremble before him, started and clicked to attention, mouth half open.

"It's lucky for you I've no time to stop and deal with you," Chonka hissed in his face, then shouted to the soldiers blocking our way: "Clear the road!"

The soldiers fell back and the car went on. Chonka, sitting in state by the driver, never once turned round to look at me.

I do not know whether he would have made good as the sea captain he had once dreamed of becoming, but as an actor he would certainly have been first-class.

It was impossible, nevertheless, to go the whole way to Studenitsa in the car. The partisans had blown up a bridge about ten miles from Matlakh's dairy-farm. We reached it towards evening. It was guarded by soldiers, and how the partisans had managed to do it nobody could make out. The bridge went up just as tanks were crossing, and two of them lay overturned in the river among fragments of girders and bridge-floor, the dammed-up water racing over and round them.

There could be no question of the car going any further.

"We'll have to walk," I told Chonka. "Send the car back."

"Nothing else for it," he sighed. "But it'll be risky along the road. Civilians in town clothes walking about here at a time like this! . . . The car was our salvation. . . ."

"We'll take a path along the river. Don't worry, I know these parts inside out."

"But what if there are partisans?" Chonka whispered. "Just imagine. . . ."

"All the better for us!"

"Yes, you're right." Chonka drew himself up. "In fact I really hope we meet them."

The driver was glad enough to return to Uzhgorod.

We waited until the car had gone, then climbed down the steep bank to the river. For half an hour or so we sat there near a group of soldiers who had seen us drive up in an army car. They were sappers sent to build a crossing. They felled trees at the edge of the forest and fastened them together with iron cramps to make a bridge-floor.

The approach of darkness stopped their work. Fires were strictly forbidden and nobody knew what to do. The officers cursed the soldiers loudly, the soldiers cursed the officers in whispers, and all alike heaped silent curses on the high command.

As soon as it was really dark, I pulled Chonka's sleeve. We rose, slipped among the bushes and began silently making our way towards the forest, looking round only when we felt a path under our feet.

* * *

It was about midnight when we came to Matlakh's dairy-farm. The watch-dogs greeted us with a deep-toned barking. A door creaked somewhere, there was a faint gleam of light.

"Who's there?" somebody called.

"Where's Semyon Rushchak?" I called back.

"And who are you?" asked a familiar voice on the other side of the closed gate.

"Is that you, Semyon? Open up, it's me, Ivan."

"There's plenty of Ivans," said Semyon. "Which one are you?"

"Belinets."

"What!"

Semyon threw the gate open quickly.

As I entered the yard I heard voices, snorting animals and rustling straw, but in the darkness I could see nothing.

"What's happening here?" I asked Semyon.

"All the pedigree cattle have been driven in from the other farms," Semyon replied. "Matlakh thought they'd be safer. The soldiers are on the run and Matlakh's afraid they might steal some of them."

"And where's Matlakh himself?" I asked when Semyon had brought us into the watchman's hut.

"We expected him today, but he didn't come. But what of it?"

"Matlakh means to drive all the cattle beyond the Tisza," I said.

"Beyond the Tisza?" Semyon's blood was up. "The old devil! So that's why he's got 'em all here! And you came to tell us, did you, Ivan?"

"Yes, to warn you."

"Thanks. . . . We'll see he doesn't get 'em. We'll take them off ourselves, hide them till our friends come. . . . They'll soon be here. . . ."

We listened for a moment in silence to the distant rumble.

"That's on the Arpad Line," Semyon whispered, then snatched his jacket off a hook and put it on. "I'll go and talk to the men. You wait for me, Ivan—not here, though, you'd better go in the store-room."

He pushed open a small door leading to a tiny out-building, clinging to the side of the hut.

After an hour, he returned anxious but pleased.

"We'll get them away at once," he said. "The men are ready. You'll have to come with us, Ivan, and tomorrow we'll find some way to get you back to Uzhgorod."

We left at three in the morning. The big barn gates were flung open, the dogs let off their chains, and the

pack-horses loaded. Men called to one another quietly in the darkness.

The guides Semyon had chosen led the way. They were followed by four heavy pedigree bulls on chains, then came the whole herd of cows, and calves driven by Kalinka. . . .

Chonka and I walked with Semyon, in front of the herdsmen armed with hunting guns who brought up the rear. The shaggy dogs ran up and down the flanks of the herd. Towards morning, when it was already getting light, we came to a concealed spot beneath the upland pasture.

Chonka and I could not leave for Uzhgorod that day. The firing which had been quieter during the night now started again, so heavily that one felt nothing could possibly remain intact.

Rushchak sent two herdsmen down to the road to see what was going on. They returned in the evening and said that the Germans had the roads covered with machine-guns and were driving the retreating Hungarians back to the pass.

"A mouse couldn't get through now."

Chonka was nervous, and I worried about Ruzhana left alone in Uzhgorod.

Another day passed, a third, and to make things worse the nights became frosty. We lighted no fires, fearing to attract attention. The men put their jackets and cloaks over the animals, and kept themselves from freezing as best they might. The calves began falling, and it is hard to say how it would all have ended if Olena Shtefak had not made her way up from Studenitsa on the fourth morning.

"Oh, Ivanko, Semyon," she cried through tears of joy. "The Soviet scouts have been through Studenitsa already. They came yesterday, and there aren't any gendarmes, they've gone, and the elder too."

"Where's Matlakh?" asked Semyon.

"He's not there," Olena answered. "She's all alone, she's running about like she was crazy, doesn't know what to do. Folks say the Red Army's passed Potoki."

Glad cries met this news.

"It's come, it's come at last!"

"Well, now," said Semyon when the first excitement had died down somewhat. "We've got to get the herd back to Studenitsa. Olena, you take charge."

"But where are you going?" Olena asked Semyon.

"I..." Semyon faltered. "I'll go by the foot-path to get there sooner, and well... make ready."

Though it was clear enough that Semyon was impatient to get sooner than the others to liberated Studenitsa, nobody made any objection.

"Coming with me, Ivanko?" he turned to me.

"I certainly am."

However, our "short cut" proved longer than the road along which the herd was shepherded; for, just as our path turned into a narrow gorge, we caught sight of German soldiers. We could not tell whether they were stragglers from routed units, taking cover in the mountains, or the regular army on a bivouac; but it meant that we could go no farther. Nor could we make a detour and climb the slope of the gorge, for the woods had been destroyed by fire and we could easily be spied by the enemy. We decided to turn back. This, too, was no good, for there were Germans behind us on the path.

The only thing we could do was to take ambush by the wayside, behind some boulders, and wait for a chance to pass unnoticed.

The chance was long in coming, so that we did not reach Studenitsa till late afternoon, weary from the excitement and alarms of the day.

As we approached Studenitsa, we could see from the distance an unusual stir and movement on the square before the inn.

"Aha!" said Semyon, peering down to see what was happening. "There's our cattle!"

"And soldiers," added Chonka, stopping for a moment. "Czechoslovaks, aren't they?"

"Look, Ivan." Semyon touched my arm. "Isn't that Matlakh's trap? . . . Yes—there he is!"

We began to run.

Afterwards, we learned what had been happening in Studenitsa.

Olena along with the herdsmen had driven the cattle down as Semyon had instructed her—not by the path, but by the road leading to the upland pasture. The way was longer, but easier for the herd. Everybody hurried in high spirits, and even Kalinka, disappointed because Semyon had not taken her with him, began to cheer up.

The whole village poured out to meet them. Women walked along the side of the road in the clouds of dust raised by the herd, little boys waved twigs and yelled war-cries, the men surrounded Olena and the herdsmen, telling them all that had happened—how Soviet Army units had passed through, moving from Volovets, and how they had been welcomed in the village.

The herd was halted on the square. Popsha had closed his inn and was standing at the window, watching from behind the curtain.

"Matlakh's not here," people told Olena when they learned that Rushchak had put her in charge.

"Where's he gone?"

"Run away, likely."

"Folks from Potoki were here, they said they'd seen him in Golubinoye."

"And someone saw him in Svalyava."

"He's tearing about all over the place. He was expecting the herd down there, so's he could drive it over the Tisza."

"Olena," said Fyodor Skripka, "what are we to do with the cattle?"

"Let them rest a bit and then we'll take them to the farm," she replied. "We'll wait for Semyon there."

As she spoke, there was movement and shouting at the back of the crowd, and the rattle of wheels. Then a trap drawn by a pair of horses came on the square, with Matlakh in it.

For some days Matlakh had been in the lowlands, dashing about from village to village, spending the nights with rich farmers he knew, reluctant to go home to Studenitsa. Misfortunes had struck him in quick succession. His hopes of welcoming the Americans in Studenitsa, as he had welcomed Horthy's men, had collapsed. Matlakh raged and abused the Americans until his breath gave out.

"Stuffed themselves till they're too fat to move, the sons-of-bitches! Got to stop at every inn! I've no legs but I'd have got there quicker. But they—they let the time go by, they let it go by. . . ." Then mastering his feelings, he said more quietly, half to himself: "Since they didn't come, we'll go to them and take the cattle with us. We'll drive them right across Europe if we have to, and get to wherever the Americans are!"

"But, Father, sometime the war'll end," Andrei tried to object. "They'll go home again, and what'll we do then? It may be worse for us in those parts than here!"

"I'll be all right anywhere," Matlakh said with a nod. "With my money I'll be welcome in those parts too. Money's everything there."

He quickly started planning how to get the cattle away; the cows on the Veretski farm, however, had already been seized by the labourers. He still hoped to get the Studenitsa herd, but Andrei, sent to inquire, returned with the news that the farm was empty, and the herd had been hidden away in the mountains.

Matlakh raged in a helpless frenzy. He tore himself out of Andrei's hands, tried to stand on his paralyzed

legs, fell and rolled about on the floor in the broker's house where he was staying, cursing and threatening, calling alternately on God and the devil. It was with the greatest difficulty that the broker and Andrei got him into the trap.

Matlakh ordered Andrei to drive him to the commandant's office, where he demanded gendarmes and soldiers to get his cattle back from the labourers. But the commandant had no time for Matlakh, did not even listen to him. Then Matlakh began pestering the officers of retreating German units, offering big money if they would help him. The officers told him to go to the devil, and only vented their rage on the frantic, paralyzed old man.

Andrei, trembling, urged his father to leave his native parts and wait for better times. But Matlakh would not listen. His wealth had become a part of him, and he could not bear the thought of losing it irrevocably. He decided to return home.

On the way he learned that the herd had been brought down from the mountains and was in the village, on the square before the inn.

He did not even stop at his own house, but drove straight to the square.

On seeing Matlakh, the people huddled together and fell silent. They hated him, but they still feared him. When Matlakh looked at their faces, however, he could read that their hatred was already greater than their fear, and realized that this was no time to think of saving the cattle, but of saving his own skin. He sighed heavily, removed his tall sheepskin hat and bowed to the crowd.

"Good people, I ask you to hear me."

"We'll hear you, no reason why we shouldn't," said some aged, judicious voice.

Matlakh waited for the tumult to die down.

"I'm an old man," he said when silence fell, "old and ailing, you all know that. And I've sinned against you

in many things, good people. But that's past, as God forgives, so you'll forgive me."

This contrite tone was unexpected. People listened, waiting to hear what would come next. A woman caught her breath and sobbed.

"Has Petro turned monk?" Fyodor Skripka called out.

There was a stir and some laughter, but it died away as Matlakh raised his hand.

"I'm giving away my cattle, good folk," he said. "Giving them away to you." His eyes searched the crowd, and he called: "Maria!"

The people moved aside to let through the widow Maria Polovka, whom Matlakh had once driven off her land. She came forward hesitantly, her eyes fixed on the face of her former master.

"Maria," said Matlakh, "choose yourself a cow and take it away. I give it to you before all the people. . . . You all hear me?"

Maria understood Matlakh's words, yet she could not believe such great good fortune could come to her—just like that, suddenly. Mother of God, she had never even dared to dream of it—a cow of her own!

"Take it! It's my own I'm giving you, Maria!" Matlakh repeated loudly, insistently.

She turned to the people standing behind her, looked round as though seeking support, but her eyes were misty, she could see nothing, and she heard Matlakh's voice repeating: "Take one! Take one!" Then Maria mustered courage and ran to the herd.

Meanwhile Matlakh was calling other names—Fyodor Skripka, Semyon Rushchak's wife, and Grandad Gritsan, now very old and completely deaf.

"I'm giving away my property," Matlakh's voice boomed over the square. "I'm giving it away with a pure heart!"

Grandad Gritsan had tottered slowly to the herd, Semyon's wife was walking round a brown cow that had caught her eye, when Olena, who had all this time been glaring at Matlakh, her eyes burning with hatred, took a few steps forward.

"Don't listen to him!" she cried. "The cattle are going to be ours anyway. We don't need any favours from Matlakh!"

"And that's a true word!" said Fyodor Skripka, pushing his way to the front. "Hey, Petro, don't go making out you're a saint! It's no good, we know you!"

"We'll share them ourselves!" someone shouted.

"Get out of here!"

"God is my witness I came to you with a pure heart," said Matlakh meekly, looking askance at the furious faces of the villagers. Then—feeling that all this might end badly for him—he ordered the coachman to turn the horses.

Before the coachman had time to pull the reins, the roar of approaching lorries sounded from the distance. The children yelled gleefully, and soon the head of a column appeared on the Studenitsa square. First came an officer in an open car, followed by troop-carriers. It was a Czechoslovak unit which had fought shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet Army.

Seeing the familiar uniform, Matlakh's bluster came back.

"Pan Officer," he yelled wildly, nearly falling out of the trap. "Stop! Please stop!"

The car halted, and a middle-aged officer in pince-nez stepped out and went up to the crowd.

Matlakh showered him with courtesies and compliments. Leaning over the side, clutching now at the edge of the trap, now at the coachman, he talked about the good old days that had come back again at last; said that God had taken pity on the enslaved and tortured people, and



that he, Matlakh, rejoiced to welcome the glorious Czechoslovak soldiers to his district. . . .

"Please help me, Pan Officer," he said. "These stupid people have lost their wits. They've taken my little bit of property and won't give it up. What sort of way is that, Pan Officer? If the people start to rob their masters, nothing good'll come of it. There's got to be law and order!"

"Wait a minute," the officer interrupted. "Just what is happening here?"

Matlakh started off again, the words tumbling over each other, glaring defiantly at the crowd, which had now grown silent.

"Since our government's come back, let it say a strong word. The whole region knows Matlakh's cattle. I've got title-deeds." He began to unfasten his shirt. "I've got title-deeds, there they are!"

He pulled out a leather bag which had replaced the old bladder, opened it with fumbling, shaking fingers and took out a package. "There they are, Pan Officer!" He turned to the villagers. "And what have you got?"

There was a pause.

"Kalinka!" Olena called suddenly. "Neighbour Fyodor! Maria! All good people! Show him our title-deeds. Look, Pan Officer, whose title-deeds are best—his or ours?" She stretched out her large, gnarled, toil-worn hands with the palms upwards.

"And mine, take a look at mine too!" Skripka, bristling, went up to Matlakh and thrust his knotted hands right under his nose.

The officer waited for the noise to subside, then turned to Matlakh.

"Their title-deeds cannot be questioned. They are genuine, there are no better ones in the world." He smiled at Olena.

There was a murmur of approval as the peasants recognized a friend in the Czechoslovak officer.

"What's this? What. . . ." Matlakh paled. "The authorities have come. . . ."

"They are the authorities," said the officer. "This land is theirs, and so is its wealth. Better not interfere with them."

It was at this moment that Semyon, Chonka and I came up.

Matlakh glowered at the people, realized that there was nothing good for him to expect there, and whispered something to his son. The latter shouted at the horses and the trap jerked forward. Before anyone knew what had happened, there was no trace of Matlakh.

I made my way through the crowd to the Czechoslovak officer and stared, hardly able to believe my eyes. It was my old Brno teacher, Jaroslav Marek, standing there on the village square in Studenitsa.

"Well, of all things! Talk about a lucky meeting!" he cried, gripping my hand warmly.

Semyon and Kalinka wanted us to go into their cottage, but Marek glanced at his watch and at the soldiers still waiting for orders, and refused.

We went aside a little, sat down on the rail of a bridge across the stream, and pelted each other with questions.

"My wife and I managed to get away," Marek told me. "We went to London first. But it was more than I could stand, with all those traitors and other rascals pretending to be patriots and all fishing in troubled waters. . . . Well, finally, with a good deal of difficulty, we got to Russia. You can guess the rest yourself. The war! A Czechoslovak Corps was formed, and, as you see, I became a soldier!"

"And Pani Marek?"

"She stopped there by the Volga. . . . We often talked of you and your Studenitsa that you told us so much about in Brno." He looked round the mountains closely

encircling the village. "And so this is it!" He turned back to me. "And that fellow who made off in the trap— isn't that your notorious Matlakh?"

I nodded.

"I guessed as much. . . . 'The good old days come back again!' Not if I know it!" Marek's eyes flashed behind his pince-nez. "It wasn't to bring those old days back that I turned soldier. You can take it from me, everything's going to be quite different in Czechia now. Nobody had better hope to fool the people again."

There seemed no end to our questions and recollections. It was getting towards evening when I accompanied Marek to the edge of Studenitsa, followed by lorry-loads of soldiers, and a whooping crowd of tireless boys.

"Well, the time's come to say good-bye," I said.

Marek frowned. "That's a word I don't like. We'll be meeting again. . . . I expect we'll be citizens of different countries, you—of your own at last, and I—of mine, but now there'll be nothing to keep us apart. And I promise you my small country will be more than just a good neighbour of your great one, it will be its friend and brother. Well, I wish you all the best!"

Then we parted.

Studenitsa was free. Chonka, Semyon, Olena and I were now treading on free land, on land which had cast off the rule of Szabo, the gendarmes and Matlakh, and all the infamy, humiliation and horror which were part of that rule. My joy, however, was clouded by thoughts of Ruzhana, Ilko and my friends, left behind in Uzhgorod. What would they go through before Uzhgorod, too, gained its freedom? The thought of it was a torment to me and I decided to get home at all costs.

Semyon tried very hard to dissuade me. Chonka was in two minds about it, but I insisted on going.

Grandad Gritsan's son, a seasoned Studenitsa hunter, who knew his way blindfold in the mountains, volunteered

to lead us to the road to Uzhgorod. He came for us to Rushchak's at night and we started out, clasping one end of a rope which Gritsan had tied to his belt.

The way was weary and beset with dangers. We scaled mountains, forded mountain streams, by-passed villages, without knowing whether they were still in the hands of the enemy or not. The night was filled with the roar of near and distant battles, skies blazed; the invisible roads below were alive with movement and rattle. At times our ear caught the sound of voices, but the words were indistinguishable.

By morning we had crossed the front-line and said good-bye to Gritsan. A day later Chonka and I reached Uzhgorod.

60

On the night of the twenty-sixth of October, retreating German and Hungarian units were passing through the city. From the down-town streets came the clatter of baggage trains, the thud of hundreds of feet, roll-call shouts and a muffled hollow din; it was as though the earth was opening up and the army transports and the men were disappearing down a chasm.

Early that evening, when the artillery shelling reached the city, I took Ruzhana and Ilko down two blocks to Oros, a vineyard worker, who was a friend of mine. He lived next to a wine-cellar. Seventy-six yards long and cut in the mountains, it was a reliable shelter in which many of the women and children of our street took cover. Ruzhana, however, soon returned. "I'll stay with you," she said, "Ilko is asleep, the Oroses will watch over him."

Her face looked thin and tired; only the eyes burned with a feverish gleam.

At about midnight a car, with a roaring motor, turned down our street and pulled up in front of the Csernekys'.

Opening the window cautiously, I could hear doors banging and muffled voices in our landlady's house. There were men running along the drive from the porch to the wicket-gate.

"Bondi, Bondi," a woman's constrained voice was saying, "take care . . . the box. . . ."

"Do not speak so loud, Mama," came the answer, "I told you to lower your voice, didn't I?"

All this went on in utter darkness.

"Running from their own house, like thieves," Ruzhana said, "that means that we haven't much longer to wait, have we?"

"No," I replied.

It was a sleepless night. Air-raid sirens kept shrilling above the city. From east to west and from west to east, planes glided invisibly, right under the stars. Blasts rent the air—roads were bombed; and fires like magnesium sparks lit up the sky. At times the rumble was so near that the windows and the plates in the room rattled plaintively. However, not the sirens, the blasts and the din of battle alone made for the sleeplessness of the night. "That day will come, Ivanko, our day, Ivanko," I recalled Gorulya's words. And now it was approaching, the day of the people's freedom, approaching after centuries of suffering. My grandfathers and great-grandfathers dreamed of it in their mountain cottages; the teacher at Bystroye, Yurko, Lobanyi and Olexa Kurtinets gave their lives for it. And now, perhaps, at the same hour tomorrow, we would rejoice in its coming.

Several times during the night I went out to listen; and as soon as the first ray of dawn shimmered in the east I made ready to leave. -

"Where are you going?" Ruzhana asked anxiously.

"I'll go. . . ." I began indefinitely, "to meet them."

Ruzhana opened her eyes wide.

"Ivanko," she burst out and stopped short without saying what was on her mind.

"What's the matter with you, Ruzhana?" I asked, approaching her. "What are you afraid of?"

"I always feared for you," she replied hurriedly, "but today more than ever. Why, if something happens to you now, just before. . ."

"Compose yourself," I said with a smile. "Nothing will happen to me, I'll soon be back."

She did not reply, and after having made an effort to overcome her fears, suddenly broke into a smile, smiling the way she used to whenever I left home with the bundles brought by Anna.

When I found myself in the street, I paused and strained my ears. There was shooting, I gathered, near Domanintsy, a suburban village off the Perechin road. It was from there that the retreating fascists surged. Shelling, too, could be heard from the direction of the Mukachevo highway. The Mukachevo highway, however, was quite a distance away. So, I made up my mind to try to get to the city outskirts, and to Domanintsy. Avoiding the streets, I scrambled through orchards and vineyards. Artillery shelling would begin, then soon die down. Shells flew overhead with an unpleasant whizzing sound and exploded somewhere beyond Domanintsy, in the Nevitsky wood.

As I made my way across hedgerows and crept through man-holes in the fences, I finally emerged in a narrow passage between the walls of two houses. It was getting light. The pale dawn was breaking over Uzhgorod, promising a clear sunny day. Just as I was about to look around the corner of the house on to the street, I heard the patter of running feet and shots; at a distance of no more than two yards a group of Nazis in mouse-coloured uniforms raced past me. Some ran without looking back, others turned and fired as they went. No answering shots

were heard, so I could not tell at whom the Germans were firing. Following the Germans came a dozen or so of Hungarian soldiers. Suddenly one of them—a tall, broad-shouldered fellow—stopped, threw down his tommy-gun and raised his hands. Another, no longer young, who matched him in build, hesitated a moment, shouted something unintelligible, flung away his gun, too, and raised his long arms as far up as he could, as though fearing they may not be seen. From the side of Domanintsy, the roaring and grinding swelled in volume, the earth shook, and the wall against which I was leaning, vibrated.

Then the tanks came by. The first one raced past, but I had time to see the five-pointed red star on its side.

Beside myself with joy, and tears in my eyes, I leaped on to the road, tore off my cap and yelled. I saw that I was not alone in the street. There were people running out of doorways and alleys, shouting, waving their caps, unutterable joy shining on the faces of some, others looking about curiously with a wariness that had not yet melted away. And the tanks kept coming one after the other—huge and dusty. The hatch of one was open and a Soviet officer stood in it, visible to the waist, his head bandaged. He waved to us with a flag and glanced casually at the group of soldiers who had surrendered, evidently accustomed to such sights. . . . I did not walk, I ran, ready to knock at every door and gate. Another block, another turn, and there at last was my own gate. Shifting from foot to foot, I kept pressing the bell-button and frowning with impatience. When I saw Ruzhana run up to the window, I shouted: "They've come, they've come!" I continued pressing the bell-button.

In a minute Ruzhana and Ilko were at the gate. The key wouldn't turn in the keyhole and soon we realized that the gate wasn't locked. I seized the boy into my arms and hurried down the street, Ruzhana hardly able to keep up with me.

"Ivanko, don't run like that, I'm all out of breath. . . . Did you see them?"

"Of course I did," I replied, without slowing down my pace.

No sooner did we get to the down-town streets than we were caught up and carried along in a human whirlpool. There were noise and shouts and chatter and joy. Hundreds of excited smiling faces of the citizens of Uzgorod flitted past me. An old man I had never set eyes on before, in a hat that had seen better days, caught me by the arm with a gnarled, work-worn hand.

"I've lived to see the day! . . . I've lived to see it," he exclaimed, choking with emotion.

Then he caught somebody else and repeated the very same words.

"Hurry, over here," I called to Ruzhana, and pointed to the middle of the square where the Soviet officer with a bandaged head stood on his tank. With difficulty I elbowed my way to the tank.

"Welcome, Comrade!" I shouted to the tankman.

"Thank you," he answered with a broad, friendly smile.

"Ruzhana, where are you?"

"Mummy, hurry," Ilko urged, "hurry, Ma. . . ."

Pushing past the crowd, I reached the Soviet tankman, and catching hold of his hand, gave it a strong clasp.

"Thank you, thank you, Comrades," the tankman kept saying, leaning down from the tank, his youthful eyes sparkling kindly.

I looked at him but could say nothing: I could not find adequate words to express even a thousandth part of that which filled my heart. How well I understood the feelings of a bare-headed woman with greying temples, who made her way to the tank, and like myself longed to say something but, finding no words, kissed the tankman's hand.

"What are you doing?" the tankman, abashed, asked severely. "You mustn't." But then, realizing the spirit

in which it was done, smiled a somewhat embarrassed smile.

The human flood pushed us back from the tank. Others were greeting the tankman. The words "Welcome, Comrade!" resounded everywhere. I was pulling Ruzhana to join another group and then a third. There were hand-clasps, greetings, smiles, all around. The feeling was one of meeting one's near ones after a long absence: a thousand thoughts and not a single word coming to mind.

I have never known our streets to be so crowded as on that day. In squares, along the embankment, on street corners, people crowded around Soviet officers, dust-covered motor lorries or baggage trains, with chatty soldier drivers perched on top of them.

Tables with heaps of apples and wicker-cased bottles filled with grape-wine, were brought out into the streets. Women standing behind the tables shouted to the passing soldiers: "Help yourselves, Comrades, help yourselves."

"They've come," Ruzhana was saying to me, "they've come, Ivanko, and you and I are living witnesses of it."

"They have come Ruzhana, and the feeling is that we, too, have come—come home."

"You are right," Ruzhana agreed. "I do not know much about politics, but I think we shall never return to the old order of things; that would be impossible."

"Are you sorry?" I asked.

"Not in the least, my dear, though I really have no idea what the new is going to be like, not the faintest idea."

I walked along the streets with a feeling as though they were new to me—not only because the Soviet soldiers were there, but because the people I now encountered had a different look; the crowd had changed in aspect and temper. But more than to anyone else, my heart went out to the Soviet soldiers in service caps and helmets, with their flow of friendly Russian speech, which rang so free

and joyous. I looked at them with admiration and amazement. To me they were not merely Russians. They were the men who had fought at Stalingrad, who had driven the Germans from their land and were liberating other peoples. I think I would have clasped the hands of the world's most famous men with less trepidation than the hands of these ordinary Soviet soldiers.

It was the twenty-seventh of October. Blessed be that day!

61

There was still hard fighting not far away, but with the very first hours of its liberation the town reached out eagerly to the new life opening before it.

A People's Committee was elected and assumed power. It banned all fascist and reactionary organizations. Its members went to the factories and helped the workers to get them running again as quickly as possible. Street names were changed, and people went round tearing down old sign-boards and placards. Russian and Ukrainian speech was heard everywhere. People no longer had to speak their own language in whispers, furtively; they used it openly, with a glad sense of freedom.

I soon made many friends among the Soviet soldiers and officers—particularly with Corporal Shumkin. He was a glass-blower who had become a sapper in the army. The headquarters of his unit were in the house previously occupied by my landlady, who had fled with her two sons, and he often looked in to see me. Shumkin was a tall, slow-moving, rather silent man, with a keen mind and a sympathetic interest in all that concerned the people about him.

He saw my green-house, walked with me over my slope, asked me many questions about my grasses and listened attentively to my explanations.

At last he said: "You know, Ivan Osipovich, you ought to meet some of our agronomists."

"I would like to," I answered, "but I haven't been able to find any, try as I would."

Shumkin said nothing.

One evening, some days later, I opened the door to a major of the Soviet Army.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," he said, smiling. "My name's Goncharov, Alexander Ignatyevich. Our mutual friend sent me to you—Comrade Shumkin."

He stood beside me bending over an old atlas—an agronomist, the chairman of a collective farm in the distant Kuban, a middle-aged, dark-skinned man, grey at the temples.

The awkwardness of the first minutes had disappeared long ago, in fact we felt as much at ease as though we were old friends.

"That's the Kuban!" said Goncharov. "From the Black Sea in the south to the Don steppelands in the north."

"It's immense!"

"Yes, it's not what you'd call small. . . . There's our district, and just here, between the hills—that's my village." Goncharov's finger halted, and a barely perceptible shadow passed over his face.

He let himself in an arm-chair and said nothing for some moments. Then he picked up his glass and took a sip of the golden-tinted wine which Ruzhana had brought us in a jug.

"You know, Ivan Osipovich," he said, "I've done a lot of thinking about the Carpathians—even when I was still at agricultural college."

"Well, why not?" I said smiling. "They say that every man keeps his childhood dreams of some distant land he has never seen."

"Yes, I know," Goncharov nodded, "and it often is that way. But this is different. . . . I studied by correspondence when I was already farm chairman. It was only at exam time I went to Krasnodar, and once when I was in the college library, there I happened to come across a paper by one of our Soviet academicians about breeds of dairy cattle. That's a weakness of mine. My father and grandfather were herdsmen. Well, what I learned from it interested me very much. In ancient times all the milch cows over the whole of Europe were the same. It was the migration of peoples and the different environments that gave rise to the various breeds we know now. There are only two places where the original breed still exists—in Switzerland and here in your Carpathians."

"The brown Carpathian cattle!"

"Yes, the brown Carpathians! But in Switzerland they've worked with them, improved them, and the result is the famous Swiss breed, while here. . . . I was amazed, Ivan Osipovich, when I learned in your villages that a mere four or six quarts is considered a normal daily yield of milk. The idea of leaving a breed like that undeveloped!"

"You're not quite right, Alexander Ignatyevich, our cattle were taken out of the Carpathians by anyone who wanted them."

"Yes, I know that too," said Goncharov. "I saw a big cattle-yard by Batevo station. Over a thousand head had been collected there to be sent away."

"I'm not surprised," I answered. "Austrians, Hungarians and Germans bought them for a song, and sent their own cattle here—to improve the local breed, so they said—and took three times the price for them. . . . They called the Carpathian cattle 'rubber cows' because as soon as they were looked after a little better, the milk yield increased so greatly."

"But that's sheer robbery!" said Goncharov indig-

nantly. "And just look at the possibilities here! These mountains with their pastures!"

"And all the time we had it dinned into our ears that this was a barren, god-forsaken place," I said bitterly.

"Well, it's only in fairy-tales you can plant a stick and it grows. As I passed through your region I recalled our own land. There was a time when I thought we'd never get anything out of it—but we did! Because—I tell you, Ivan Osipovich—by working collectively free people can do anything! What d'you think our collective farm started out with? Fifteen small holdings, no more, and in all the fifteen there was only one horse—if you could call it a horse! All we thought of was getting enough to eat, but it was a whole new life that began—a life without boundaries, a life of sunshine! If it hadn't been for the war. . . ."

The major broke off and his eyes clouded and gazed into the distance as though seeing something about which it was impossible to talk. I felt the great effort of will with which he thrust down something within him. Seconds passed, a minute, and his eyes regained their sparkle, though there was still weariness in them.

"Yes, yes, a life of sunshine," he repeated, "there's no other word for it."

He began quietly telling me about his far-away collective farm in the Kuban, about what life had brought to him, the son and grandson of herdsmen, and to other people in his village.

As I listened, the years seemed like the steps of a ladder leading higher and higher. The first crop taken off the collective-farm fields. The first tractor turning up virgin soil only just cleared. The first acres of orchard planted on a slope by the young people of the farm which was called "Road to Communism." Then a terrible, shattering event—the murder of the first chairman of the farm by some kulaks. Alexander Goncharov, a Komsomol lad, was elected in his place.

One by one Goncharov led me up the steps of the years. I envied him his memory. He had forgotten nothing, not even the number and weight of the grains in the ears of the good and bad harvests of the various years.

Goncharov paused and took a cellophane envelope of photographs from his tunic-pocket.

"These were taken by our amateur photographers' group at the farm," he said with a smile.

One by one he placed them on the open map—the orchard originally laid out by the young people covered with snowy blossom, the white farm buildings, the old shepherd Nikifor Yakovenko with his flock, the team-leader and group-leaders, a milkmaid who had taken a study course and become a cattle-breeding expert, the blacksmith who had become director of a machine and tractor station.

"Here we all are, watching a play in the farm clubhouse in 1939," said Goncharov, and looked for a long time at the dear, familiar faces. "And here is my wife and little girls by the house," he said almost in a whisper and repeated: "My wife and my little girls. . . ."

Ilko came up to the table—he was a thin but strong lad with large eyes. It was hard to say whom he resembled. Sometimes I thought that he was Ruzhana over again, at others—when he drew his brows together, thinking about something—I seemed to see my mother before me.

He climbed up and knelt on a chair, looked at the pictures, and then his eyes wandered to the decorations on the major's tunic.

"What did you get those for?" he asked.

"Various things," said Goncharov. "The first Order is for the Battle of Stalingrad, the second for the Battle on the Dnieper. . . ."

"And that little one?" Ilko carefully touched a small medal on a green ribbon.

"That medal was awarded at the Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow." Turning to me, he added: "A battle too, but of another kind—a battle for grass. . . . For mountain lucerne. . . ."

"Mountain lucerne?" I repeated, searching my memory.

"Oh, you won't know it," said Goncharov, "it isn't in any atlas of vegetation yet. But it will be, you can be sure of that! We grew it first on an experimental field by the laboratory. We spent ten years training it—first of all to grow on the heights, then to give a big yield right away and to resist weeds and choke them. It was a hard job, and we were often advised to give it up, they kept telling us that nothing would come of it. But we kept on—we were sure of its strength, and of course there's nothing like it for feed and it's good for the soil too. The last year before the war we got two-and-a-half times as much per acre as we did of alpine clover. It's not grass, it's a true bread-winner."

We talked about grasses until late into the night. Goncharov eagerly examined my meum and soil samples, argued, advised, jotted things down in his note-book, and pondered silently after listening to all I told him about Fyodor Skripka, Svyatinya, Semyon Rushchak, and the furrows they had given me for my experiments.

It was long after midnight when Goncharov got up to leave. Before I let him go, we had a last glass of wine together.

"I don't know whether I'll be able to drop in again," he said. "Probably not, but when the war's over I'll come back. I'm sure everything here in the Carpathians is going to be quite different now. And if you feel like writing to me, I'll be very glad to hear from you."

I noted down his address in the Kuban.

He did not come again.

A few days later Shumkin came to say good-bye.

"The unit's rested, Ivan Osipovich," he said. "Time

to be getting forward. That's how it is—we don't stop long in one place. Your major's gone already—I was there when his unit left yesterday.... By the way, you may not know," Shumkin sighed, "the men say the major's got nobody and nothing left in the Kuban."

"How's that?"

"The fascists destroyed it all. They killed his wife and children—killed them brutally—and there's only ashes left of the whole farm—the buildings, the orchards, everything's gone...."

"Does he know?"

"Of course ... he was with the troops that cleared the Nazis out of those parts. He knows...."

62

At last our region was completely liberated. For the first time in many long years it had the right to follow its own road and decide how it wanted to live. The road had been chosen long ago—not at any round table, not at any secret diplomatic parleys, but in the mountain villages, the forest huts, the Solotvino salt mines. It had been the hope cherished in dark nights by Verkhovina herdsmen and wood-cutters, Mukachevo tobacco-workers and the small farmers of the valleys—by all who loved their native tongue, who cared for their children's future, who in making a vow swore by their Russian soul.

I do not know who first sounded the call: "Home to our mother, the Soviet Ukraine!" but this call voiced the will of the liberated people. And in accordance with this will, a Congress of the People's Committees of Sub-Carpathian Ukraine was called in Mukachevo on November 26, 1944.

Not only the delegates went to Mukachevo that day—many other people gathered from all parts—from Uzh-

gorod, Chust, Rakhov and Beregovo. I was elected one of the delegates from Uzhgorod.

The weather was damp and dull on the twenty-sixth, with an occasional drizzle. Low-lying clouds drifted over the sky, and a cold wind blew—the usual weather in late autumn. But Mukachevo was indifferent to the weather. The red flags and streamers spoke of festivity. From early morning the streets were filled with crowds of people—people of all kinds, townsfolk mingled with villagers, some of them from the most outlying parts. One could see the embroidered waistcoats of the Hutsuls, the grey jackets of men from Irshava and Volovets, and the shaggy cloaks like sheepskins of the Perechin people. Crimson ribbons glowed on waistcoats, jackets and cloaks, and the usual pine twigs and bunches of bristles on the hats had been replaced by crimson paper flowers.

The crowd was particularly dense in front of the cinema where the Congress was to be held. Delegations kept arriving. They passed under the big archway of a five-storey building to the cinema entrance. There, ushers with red armlets were waiting to direct them to their places.

"Where are you from?"

"Rostoka!"

"Where are you from?"

"Russkoye Pole!"

"Where are you from?"

"Verkhniye Vorota!"

"Jasinal!"

"Bogdan!"

"Sineviri!"

Days like this are remembered to the end of one's life, however long and full of other joys it may be. I, too, know that I shall never forget that great hall flooded with light, the floor, balcony and boxes all packed with people. I remember the presidium table and the flowers standing

on it, and the ovations when one after the other people went to the rostrum to demand union with our great motherland, and how the clapping seemed about to break through the walls with gratitude when the Soviet Union was mentioned. In that everything was expressed—the freedom which the Soviet Army had brought, and supreme confidence in the future.

Most of the speakers were simple plain people and their words were simple and plain, close to the hearts of all. I heard somebody sitting behind me say to his neighbour: "Lawyers used to speak for the people, but what they said wasn't what the people thought at all; now the people are speaking for themselves."

I turned to see who the speaker was, but at that moment the chairman rose and announced: "On behalf of the partisans of the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine—Mikola of the Black Mountain will now speak."

"Sit down, sit down!" came voices from behind me. On either side people were pulling my sleeve, but I remained standing, my eyes were fixed on the passage between the seats up which a man moved unhurriedly to the speaker's stand. I still could not see his face, but I knew it was Gorulya.

He was greeted with thunderous applause that grew in volume as he approached the rostrum. Lightly and easily, without touching the rail, he climbed the steep steps and turned towards the audience. I saw nothing except that one face. It seemed at that moment as though nothing had changed in it through all these years, only the hair had whitened and gleamed like silver in the bright light.

Gorulya stood on the rostrum, looking down at the hall as though rejoicing at all he saw there.

"I congratulate you, Brothers and Comrades, on this day of freedom!" he said. "'A land without a name,' honest people said about our land. Yes, that's what it was called by those who saw the bitter lot of the people. Why

did they call it that, you'd ask? Because those who lorded it over us wanted us to forget our very name and origin. It had been the land of Ugrians for the Austrian emperors, the land of Sub-Carpathian Russines for Pan Masaryk, the land of Ruthenians for Horthy and the Magyar fascists. While all the time it had its own name which could be neither erased nor burned out of the people's heart—it has always been our Ukrainian land, as it always shall be, as long as the sun shines upon the earth."

Gorulya smiled as the silent hall exploded into a burst of applause.

"Mikola of the Black Mountain is my partisan name," he continued. "I took it after Olexa Kurtinets, but I myself am Ilko Gorulya from the Verkhovina village of Studenitsa. I was sent to prison in Brno for speaking the truth, was sent for seven years, but I escaped and made my way through two cordons to the East, to the Soviet Union. I lived in many places there, and I saw how man can and must live. It was life I saw, good people, life. . . Glory for it to the Communist Party and Soviet power, a hundred times and a thousand times glory!"

The Congress answered with clapping and shouts of "Glory!"

Gorulya waited for the ovation to die down, then continued: "Over the Kremlin gates in Moscow I saw a tall tower and a clock; when that clock strikes, Soviet people in the Ukraine, and in the Caucasus, and in Siberia set their watches by it. We, too, want to set our time by the Soviet clock!"

The hall resounded with applause as Gorulya descended from the rostrum.

I struggled out of my place and quickly, almost running, went up the aisle to meet Gorulya.

He stopped, looked at me, and a smile lighted his face.

"A great day, Ivankol" was all he had time to say as we embraced.

From then on we sat together. Gorulya would not let me move a step from him.

The greatest, most memorable hour of the Congress came in the evening when the delegates rose to their feet to hear the manifesto which the representatives of the People's Committees were to sign. The hall was silent, and that silence held everything—triumph, the essence of all that had been and all that was to come. Everybody knew that the life, the destiny, the future of our people was being decided. The only sound was the voice of Anna Kurtinets, breaking with emotion as she read the text of the manifesto:

"To reunite the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine with its great mother—the Soviet Ukraine. . . ."

No longer was ours "a land without a name."

63

When Gorulya and I went to Uzhgorod next day, we found groups of excited people standing at house entrances and corners, reading and discussing the manifesto which had been printed and pasted up.

Ruzhana was delighted to see Gorulya. In a moment the house was filled with bustle—doors banged, things were moved about, bath water was heated and dishes rattled in the kitchen.

"I didn't know I'd give all this trouble, Ivanko," said Gorulya, rather embarrassed. "I'd never have come if I had!"

But I could see in his eyes that he was pleased.

Ilko followed the old man about like a shadow. At first he was somewhat shy, but soon got over that and took complete possession of Gorulya.

"Grandad," he said, holding up a star which one of the Soviet soldiers had given him, "why's it red?"

"Why, don't you know?" asked Gorulya, feigning surprise.

"No."

"Oh dear, oh dear, fancy not knowing!" Gorulya shook his head. "When the first Red Army man, the very first one, reached out for a star, his enemies didn't want to let him to it. They fired at him, fired at his hands, and wounded them, but he kept on climbing up higher and got his star all the same! And when he looked at it he saw it was red with blood. But that blood made it shine all the brighter, it shone so that it could be seen right at the other end of the world!"

The days Gorulya spent with us were very happy. One thing only troubled me—as the days went by Gorulya seemed to become more silent. Was it weariness that had at last overcome this indefatigable man—natural enough after so many long years of trial and danger? Or was he saddened by thoughts of a lonely old age? Gafia was dead, his cottage was burned down. The cause for which he had fought, to which he had devoted all his strength, all his heart, was won, the rest would follow. Loneliness! In the struggle he had forgotten about it, but now it had overtaken him. I made up my mind that somehow I must persuade him to stop in Uzhgorod.

"Of course it'd be better for him, living with us," Ruzhana agreed.

One evening I went into Gorulya's room. The light was out; he had drawn back a corner of the black-out curtain and was standing by the window, looking out at the moonlit town. As the door creaked, he turned.

"It's good that you've come," he said. "I was just thinking—time for me to be getting home tomorrow. I've been here long enough."

"Why, is it so bad here with us?"

"Nay, I've enjoyed being here," said Gorulya, "but all the same it's time to go. . . ."

"Well, Ruzhana and I've decided that you're not going anywhere."

"How's that?" said Gorulya in surprise, lowering the pipe which he had been about to light.

"No, you're not leaving us," I repeated. "You'll live here. Everything that you fought for has come, a new life is beginning, and you've every right to take it easy. You're not so young, after all."

"Thank you, son," said Gorulya, "and thank your wife too. Well, if folks think I'm getting old, I must bel... But I'm not finished yet, Ivanko, I'm only starting."

Gorulya drew in a deep breath as a man does when he thinks of something great and splendid just ahead of him.

"You say that what I wanted has come," he went on, his head cocked to one side, "and that's true enough. It's come! But there's a lot more I want yet! Freedom's only the corner-stone, the house has still to be built. There's plenty to do yet at home, plenty! We've got to build up our life again right from the foundations, Ivanko, and it's not so easy, that! And we've plenty of enemies. They used to run about openly, like mice in famine time, but now one pretends to be a friend, and another takes to the forests to rob and kill, and all of them will try every way they can to stop the people advancing towards a life of happiness. There's Matlakh—he's not in Studenitsa. He's somewhere, though. D'you think he'll change?... And Leshchetsky's disappeared, but he's not gone far, look out for him. So you see, Ivanko, there's enough to do! But thank you for thinking of me."

No arguments or persuasion would shake him; he stuck to his purpose and prepared to leave the next day.

The following evening we went with Gorulya to the station. Everything there was dark, with tiny green lights showing the switches on the line. Trains made only a few moments' stop, so we said good-bye quickly and Gorulya climbed in at once.

"I'll be home in the morning," he said.

The train had already started and I was walking alongside the coach when Gorulya leaned down to me, holding the rail, and asked:

"Maybe you'll come back to Verkhovina too, Ivanko? The key's found, but it's got to be used. . . . What about coming too?"

I heard no more above the rattle of wheels. The last coach passed, the rattle faded and the engine whistled shrilly, as though calling: "You too, you too!"

64

By decision of the First Congress of the People's Committees, the big estates and the land belonging to enemies of the people who had fled with the fascists were confiscated. All this land had to be carefully registered and distributed free of charge to the thousands upon thousands of farm-labourers and peasants with small plots. That land for which brother had fought brother with axes, sons had desired the death of fathers, the land which had parted lovers and turned friends into enemies, began to lose its evil power over man.

Free land, land only for those who worked on it—it seemed unbelievable, although people had long known that Lenin had given the land to the peasants in Russia as far back as 1917. Everybody in the villages was waiting for the division of the land—some in joyful impatience, others with resentment, still others bewildered: "Eh, neighbour! Queer sort o' land, that you can't buy or sell!"

I was asked to come to the People's Committee of the Uzhgorod district. When I arrived, Verny rose from his desk to greet me, and asked me to sit down.

"I suppose you know, Comrade Belinets," he said, "we've to divide the land among the peasants with no land or with small plots, and do it as well and as quickly as possible. The first thing is to know everything we can about the land which belonged to estate-owners and enemies of the people who have fled. For this we need the help of everybody who understands agriculture."

"I shall be glad to do what I can," I said.

"Then please go to our Agricultural Department, they'll tell you what's wanted. Arrange with them which group of Uzhgorod villages you'll take over."

"But why can't I go to Verkhovina, to the Studenitsa district, Comrade Verny?" I objected. "Those are my own parts!"

"Oh no," Verny laughed. "We're not letting you away from Uzhgorod! Don't ask us! There's more land here, and more people are needed. And besides, I've already spoken at the People's Rada about you."

I tried to argue, but Verny was firm. He wished me success and we parted good friends.

The Uzhgorod Agricultural Department gave me a cluster of villages round about Sredny—a big, lively place on the high road half-way between Uzhgorod and Mukachevo. I got all the necessary papers and full instructions how to conduct the work, and left next day.

The work started off well. I was a member of a commission consisting mainly of local people—farm-labourers and villagers who knew every inch of the ground throughout the district.

People came from the near-by villages and stood for hours round the building where we worked—men and women whose lives had been an endless struggle for existence, farm-labourers who possessed nothing but their gnarled hands, widows with little children. I talked to those widows and I thought of Olena; consulted the

labourers and recalled Semyon Rushchak; met peasants who had struggled through long years of bitter want on their tiny plots, and remembered Fyodor Skripka.

I lived in one of the rooms at the People's Committee offices and took my meals at the inn near the edge of the village. The innkeeper was a sturdy fellow with sly, shifty eyes who made a great show of wanting to please me.

One winter evening I returned from a neighbouring village very late. The inn was closed, but I was hungry and chilled to the bone. Perhaps I would not have ventured to disturb the innkeeper had I not noticed a crack of light in the window, and a car standing by the gate.

I went to the door and knocked quietly. There was no answer. I knocked again. Still no response. I thought of tapping at the window, but happened to give the door a slight push and it opened. I went into the long, lighted entry with tubs standing here and there, and made my way to a door on my left. It opened before I had time to touch it and two men came out—one in a leather jacket with slit pockets, evidently the chauffeur, and the other—Matlakh's son Andrei.

Naturally, his father was there too. At the back of the room, on his famous wheel-chair, a plaid over his legs, sat Matlakh. When he saw me he turned his head away—the instinctive movement of a man who does not want to be recognized. Realizing how useless it was, he stretched his lips into a smile and reluctantly forced out a greeting: "Good evening, Pan Belinets. . . ."

I stood staring at him in silence.

"Why, don't you even want to speak to me?" said Matlakh, shaking his head reproachfully. "Just as though we weren't old acquaintances. And what am I now? A beggar, sick, nothing but a burden to myself. God has punished me for my sins, and they were many, I can't deny it, many sins, Pan Belinets," whined Matlakh.

But his eyes spoke more truly than his tongue: "Oh no, I'm still alive, I've still got teeth and I'm ready to use 'em, I'll wade through blood and turn all to ashes, but I won't give in!" That was what his eyes said.

"I'm looking for the innkeeper," I said, ignoring his remarks.

The chauffeur and Andrei came back into the room.

"Who opened the door to you?" Andrei asked.

"Nobody," I said. "It wasn't locked."

Matlakh exchanged glances with his son.

At that moment the innkeeper wallowed in, bringing a bundle of fire-wood. A look of fear came into his eyes at the sight of me.

"Oh, it's you, sir! I'd just gone out a minute for wood. These are all good old customers! They came late. . . . You didn't come for dinner today, sir, or supper, I thought you'd gone away. Eh, what a pity, what a pity I haven't anything but wine to offer you!"

I had lost all desire either to eat or drink, however; all I could think of was how to get to the People's Committee as quickly as possible and warn them of the arrival of these "good old customers."

"Thanks, I'm not hungry. I only came to say that tomorrow—" I stumbled, but caught myself up—"tomorrow I'll want dinner two hours earlier than usual."

"At your service any time, sir," said the innkeeper, showing his teeth in a smirk, and stood politely aside to let me pass.

I went out, pulled my fur hat further down over my ears and walked quickly away from the inn.

The road zigzagged among the Sredny houses with sudden twists. I walked alone along the snow-swept path. I knew that I had to turn into a lane on the left and go to the fourth house from the corner, where the chairman of the People's Committee lived. It was not far to the lane. I quickened my steps.

I heard a car coming up somewhere behind. It swung round the corner. The head-lights were off. I moved to the side. But instead of keeping to the middle of the road the car swung right over on my side. I jumped back, but too late. I felt a hard blow, gave a cry and lost consciousness. . . .

65

Part of the winter, all spring, all summer and part of the autumn—for nine months I was tied to a hospital bed, imprisoned in plaster of Paris.

The first person I saw when I recovered consciousness after the operation was Gorulya. Catching my glance, he bent over me and asked me what had happened.

With great difficulty, in a voice barely audible, I told him what I knew and what I suspected.

"There they are, our enemies, Ivanko," said Gorulya. "We're looking for them and we'll find them . . . it may be sooner, it may be later, but found they will be. It isn't only Matlakh, there's a whole gang of them. Now lie quiet, don't worry about anything and get well, son."

He left the room. I was too weak and exhausted even to follow him with my eyes.

My recovery was slow and difficult. Nine months is a long time. But even in hospital I could feel the racing events of those days. Life had begun to rush ahead.

A treaty between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia put an end once and for all to a centuries-old injustice. Our green Carpathian region was united with our native Ukraine, it became Soviet, and Ruzhana, Gorulya, the doctor treating me, I myself, were citizens of the Soviet Union. The land which had been given to the people was ploughed by tractors from the Urals, and the hired farm-hands of yesterday grew grain for themselves. A university was opened in Uzhgorod—the first higher educational establishment in our region; laboratory equip-

ment and books were sent to us from Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad, Kharkov. Delegates from our farming districts went to visit the collective farms along the Dnieper, and at the long-distance telephone office in Uzhgorod, so Chonka told me, the operator would call people waiting to be put through: "Kiev—second box," "Moscow—first box," "Kharkov doesn't answer. Wait a bit."

We had become a part of our great homeland. Our life pulsed in tune with its life.

One day Ruzhana came to me in particularly high spirits. After asking how I felt, she bent over me and whispered:

"We're going to move, Ivanko."

"Where?" I asked in surprise.

"Into our house."

I did not at first understand what she was talking about.

"Our house," Ruzhana repeated. "The People's Committee has given it to us."

"Why, did you apply for it?"

"Yes," Ruzhana nodded. "I kept all the papers. And we had witnesses. . . . But I didn't want to tell you until everything was settled. You aren't angry with me, are you?"

"Now don't you worry about anything," she whispered, without waiting for me to reply, "just get well as quickly as you can. Do you hear me, Ivanko?"

At last the day came when I could leave the hospital. Everything gave me joy—my first steps without a stick, my first day of work at the Agricultural Department.

We were now living on Vysokaya. Thanks to Ruzhana's care, my life was quiet and peaceful, and I enjoyed it with all my heart.

One Sunday, when Ruzhana had taken Ilko for a walk, leaving me alone, I heard through the open window a car draw up at our gate. Somebody called:

"Is this where Belinets lives?"

I looked out of the window. A dust-coloured limousine with a spare petrol-tin strapped to the mudguard stood by the gate; it had obviously come a long distance.

"Yes, it is," I said to the invisible passenger. "Will you come in?"

A woman in a dust-coat emerged from the car. I recognized Anna Kurtinets. She saw me at the window, waved her hand and smiled. I ran down to the gate.

"I've been looking for you half the day," said Anna, shifting a brief-case to the other hand to greet me. "I didn't know your address, but I had to find you."

She went through the garden to the house with her usual quick, firm, energetic steps, turning round to me every minute.

"Let me have a look at you, Ivan. Why, you're grand! I went to the hospital, but they wouldn't let me see you, you know how strict doctors are."

"I wish you'd been a bit more insistent!"

"Oh, I can be insistent enough," Anna laughed, "but after all, rules are made to be kept.... Well, I didn't get into Uzhgorod again, I'm working in Verkhovina now, in your parts. I'm Secretary of the Regional Committee."

We went into the house.

"Where are Ruzhana and Ilko?" asked Anna, looking round.

"They've gone out for a walk. If only Ruzhana'd known you were coming! We often talk about you."

"I don't forget you either.... By the way, Gorulya and Rushchak send their regards...."

"How are they getting on?"

"They're starting to live. Setting up the first collective farm in Verkhovina."

"I know, Gorulya wrote me about it.... It's to be named after Olexa."

"Yes, after Olexa," Anna said softly. She thought a moment. "You know—I still can't believe that he's dead.... I suppose I never shall believe it, really...."

She walked up and down the room once or twice, then stopped at the bookcase and ran her finger along the backs of the books. When she turned to me again, her face was calm as usual.

"It's not such a simple matter to change a way of life that's continued for centuries," she said. "Some people are foolish enough to think that if a villager joins a collective farm he drops all his old habits at once and turns into quite a different person. It's the first step and a tremendous step, but still—it's only the first. And what's being done in Studenitsa now is only a beginning.... Can you guess why I've come to Uzhgorod, Ivan?" Anna asked suddenly.

"No." I looked at her inquiringly.

"I've come to get you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

Anna threw down the brief-case, opened it, and among the various papers it contained I saw a familiar green folder.

"Your memorandum on Verkhovina," said Anna.

"Where on earth did you find that?"

"In the archives of the Agricultural Department.... We can't have a live thing like this getting yellow and dusty among old reports and worthless papers."

I stared with the strangest feeling at that green folder. Then I began mechanically turning the pages, one after the other. They rustled under my fingers, but I could not see a single word, a single line. I knew now why Anna had come for me, yet I asked: "What do you want?"

"We want you, Ivan," said Anna, taking back the folder and putting it in her brief-case. "I've come to ask you to start the work you once dreamed of. Verkhovina

needs agronomists now, and not just ordinary agronomists, but people who will change everything, people who can look into the future and work for it. Talk it over with Ruzhana, but remember that time won't wait."

66

It was March. Snow still lay everywhere in Verkhovina, but in Uzhgorod the sun shone with the warmth of spring.

For three days the atmosphere in our house had been heavily charged. Ruzhana went about in silence. I felt for her sincerely, and I was afraid of that feeling. It would have been so much easier if she had argued or quarrelled.

Now Chonka was pacing up and down my study, still in hat and coat.

"Aren't there any other agronomists?" he asked. "D'you think you're the only one?"

"Far from it," I answered, restraining my irritation. "If I don't go, others will, perhaps better ones, but don't you understand this is what I've been wanting and working for all my life!"

Chonka frowned.

"I'd have understood you, Ivan, if it hadn't been for that damned letter."

Again and again all talk inevitably came back to the letter which Ruzhana had found in our box a few days before.

"That's for you, read it," she said, her voice trembling, and handed me an open envelope.

I took out a sheet of paper, opened it and went to the light.

"Pan Belinets! If you know what is good for you, you will not go to Verkhovina. In Sredny you were lucky, but do not expect to get off so easily in Studenitsa. This is a warning from friends."

The letter had been typed and posted in Uzhgorod. For a second I thought it was some stupid practical joke, but then I thought of Matlakh's look in the Sredny inn, and remembered that Gorulya and Anna Kurtinets had received similar letters.

Ruzhana's anxious eyes were fixed on my face.

"You can't go, Ivanko..."

"Why not? I'm not the only one they try to frighten this way, but people keep on with their work, threats or no threats.... Those scoundrels can't halt progress, they'll never be masters of Verkhovina again!"

Ruzhana did not answer, but when I came back from Verny to whom I had taken the letter, she met me with the words: "You mustn't go, Ivanko."

... And now here was Chonka with his apprehensions and his advice.

"All right," he said, sitting down on the arm of a chair, "agreed that you can give up an excellent job, your house, and the respect you enjoy here, and go to work as an agronomist in some god-forsaken hole in Verkhovina—all right, but to live in constant peril?!"

"Nothing risk, nothing gain," I answered.

"All right, have it your own way," he snapped, offended. "I'm off, it's time to be getting to the bank..."

I saw nothing of Ruzhana all day. She stopped in her own room and did not even come to dinner. Several times I wanted to go to her, but I restrained myself.

She came out herself as dusk was falling and sat down beside me. I wanted to put the light on but she stopped me.

"Don't."

I found her hand in the darkness and stroked it.

"So you've decided?" she asked.

"Yes. I've decided, Ruzhana, I can't do anything else. Listen to me quietly, try to understand."

"Very well," she said. "I'll listen quietly."

I spoke slowly, gently, my eyes closed—I felt as though my whole life were passing before me, my childhood, my mother's death, starvation, Olenka, and Mikola's key—the dream that had grown up with me.

"You know yourself, Ruzhana, what I've gone through in these years. Even in the very worst times I never stopped thinking of Verkhovina. And now—when Verkhovina itself calls me—how can I refuse to answer the call?"

Ruzhana caught back a sigh.

"And doesn't my peace of mind mean anything to you—our home, our life together that's settled down at last after so many years?" she asked. "Think how much we've gone through, how difficult it's all been, and now when everything's come at last..."

"That's not you speaking, Ruzhana..."

"Who, then?"

"Julia, the Kolena Brothers, anybody—but you..."

Ruzhana took away her hand, offended. There was a silence, then she rose and went out of the room.

Five hours remained before my train left. I was lying on the sofa, in the darkness, thinking of what lay before me. My mind explored the future, seeing pictures, each one fairer than the other. Was it possible that Ruzhana would fail to understand? I could not believe it. Not right at once, perhaps, but later—she would surely understand....

The excitement of the past few days, the tiring preparations for the journey, the darkness in the room had their effect and I fell asleep.

... I was awakened by Ruzhana's quiet voice.

I opened my eyes. The light was on and Ruzhana was looking at me affectionately, with a tinge of reproach.

"Ivanko! Get up, dear, it's time to go."

* * *

Ruzhana went with me to the station. Our steps rang for joy in the quiet streets of slumbering Uzhgorod. On but tight rumbled the river hidden behind the orchards, and there was a cool breeze.

reception dear, Ivanko, I'll never have a quiet life with

Ruzhana sighed, but I knew from her voice that she was smiling.

"No, you never will," I laughed in reply. "That I promise you."

"And it seems, I ought to say 'thank you' for it," she went on. "It was right what you said—let the dead lie quiet. . . . But you know," she continued after a pause, "I don't think I'll come to you in June."

I even stopped for a second.

"Why, how's that? I thought we'd settled all that, Ruzhana?"

"Yes, we settled it, but now I've changed my mind. It's too far off—March, April, May, June. . . . I'll come in April. And you speak to Anna, Ivanko—maybe there's some work I could do there too. . . ."

"There will be," I said tenderly. "You needn't worry about that."

We took a short cut to the station, along the railway line and through the goods station. It was a long time since I had been there at so late an hour, and I hardly recognized it. Even in the middle of the day I had never seen such a bustle of work. The big flood-lights had carved a large space out of the night. Long goods trains were standing on the sidings. Here and there impatient engines were shunting, emitting puffs of steam that looked from a distance like trees silvered with frost. There were voices, shouts, and the horns of the couplers.

New tractors shining with fresh paint were rolling down boarded inclines from the platform-trucks, and ploughs such as I had never seen, with shares that looked

like the wings of huge birds. A little further off, big rolls of paper lay heaped up, and beside them sacks and packing-cases which had just been unloaded from a train. We read the names of towns they had come from—Khar-kov, Sverdlovsk, Kiev, Rostov, and one we had never even heard of—Balakhna; all this was our country, our own country! . . .

I tried to visualize this whole great land from end to end, but felt that it was impossible. "Only the heart can grasp all its strength and beauty," I thought.

"How quickly everything's changed, Ivanko!" said Ruzhana.

Our eyes met, and I understood that my feelings were hers.

We quickened our steps. The lights of the passenger station shone in front of us. Veiled now and then by clouds of steam, those lights seemed to be summoning us. The even rumble of a train carried to us through the spring night, and the whistle of an engine. It seemed to be saying: "You too, you too!"

My lips moved silently, repeating: "Me too!"



